# THE JOHN SHIPEYS ELIZABETH PRICE



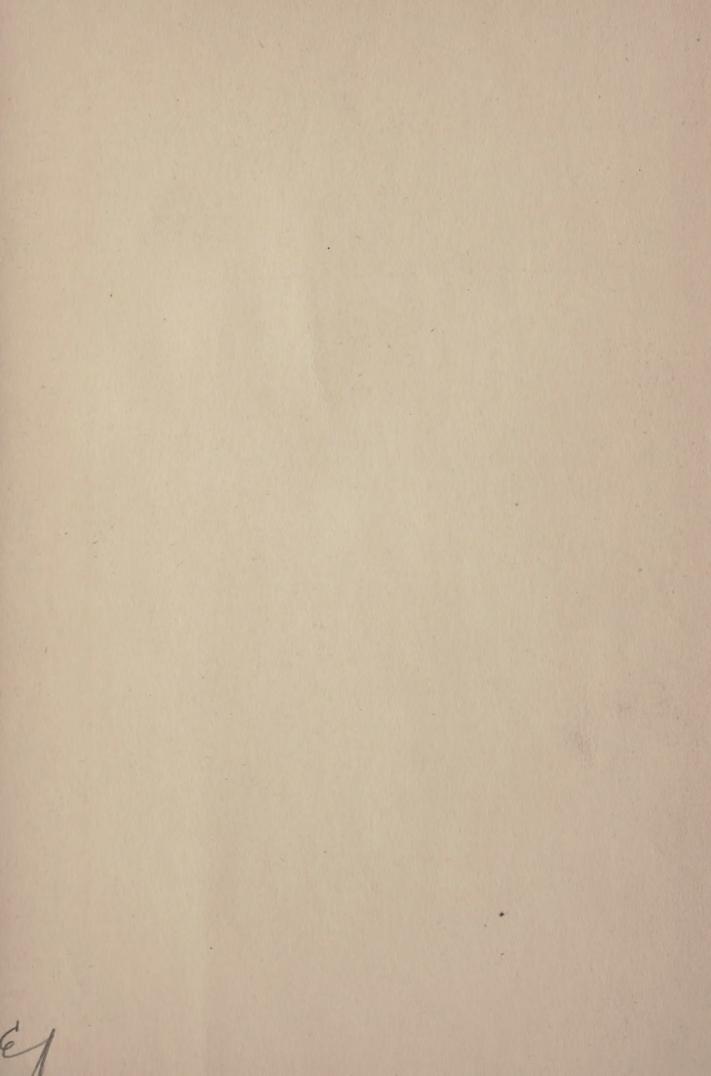


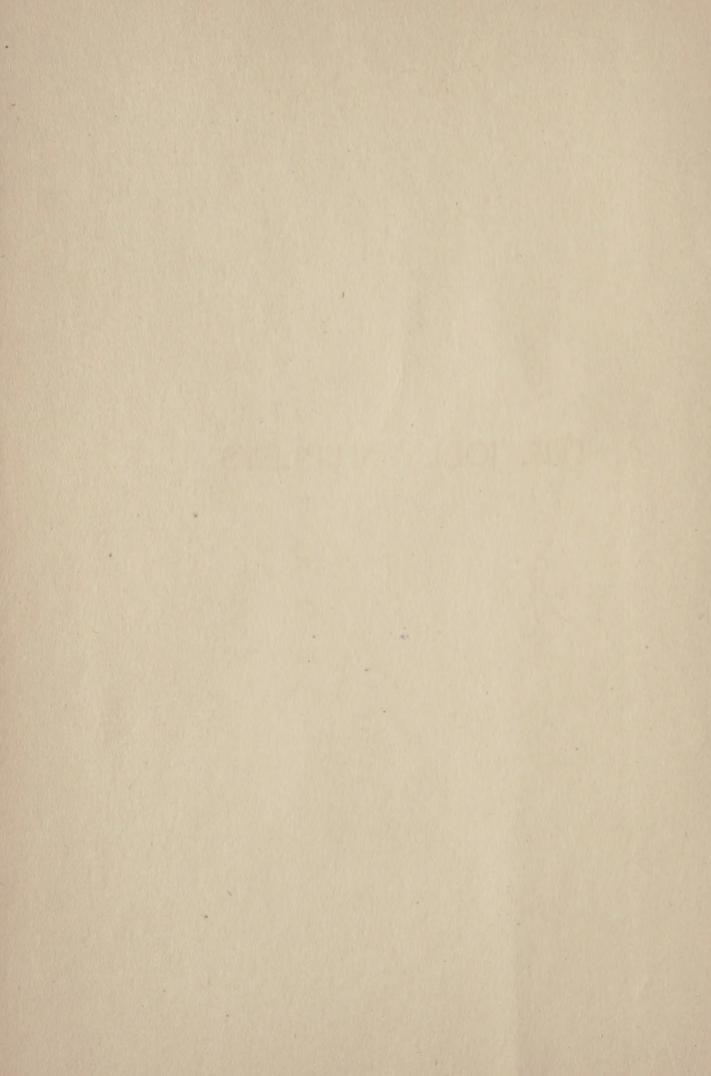
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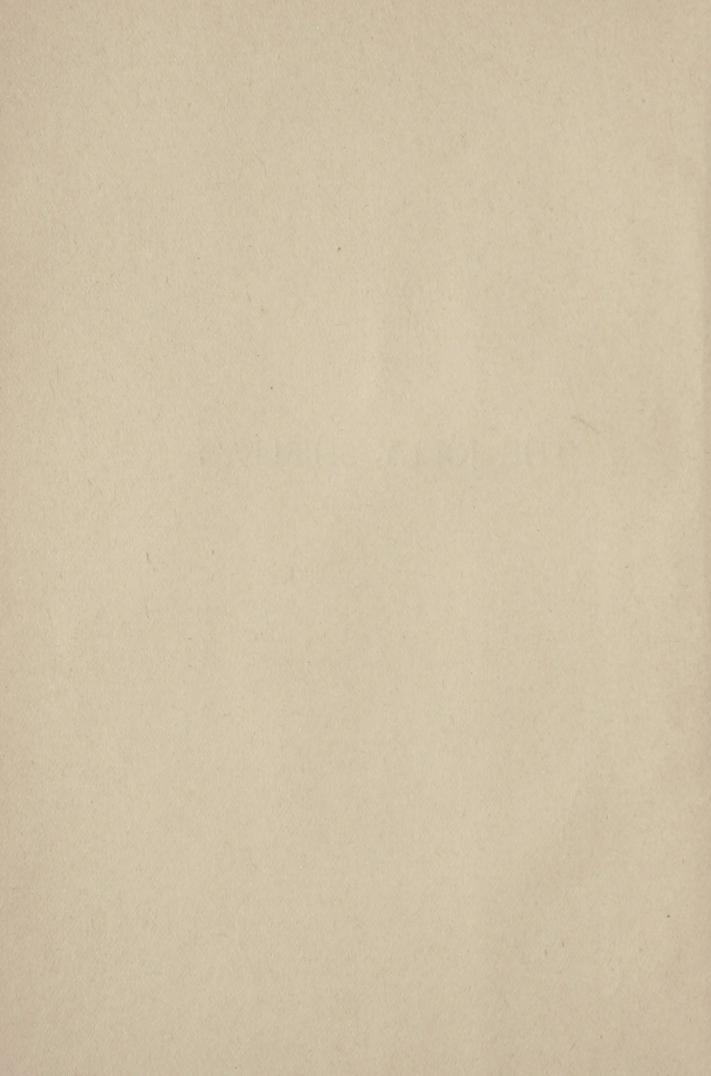
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# THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS







Mamma Shipley fried the very perch they'd caught.—Page 123

# THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS

ELIZABETH PRICE

Author of

"FREDERICA DENNISON, SPINSTER," etc.



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BOSTON CHICAGO

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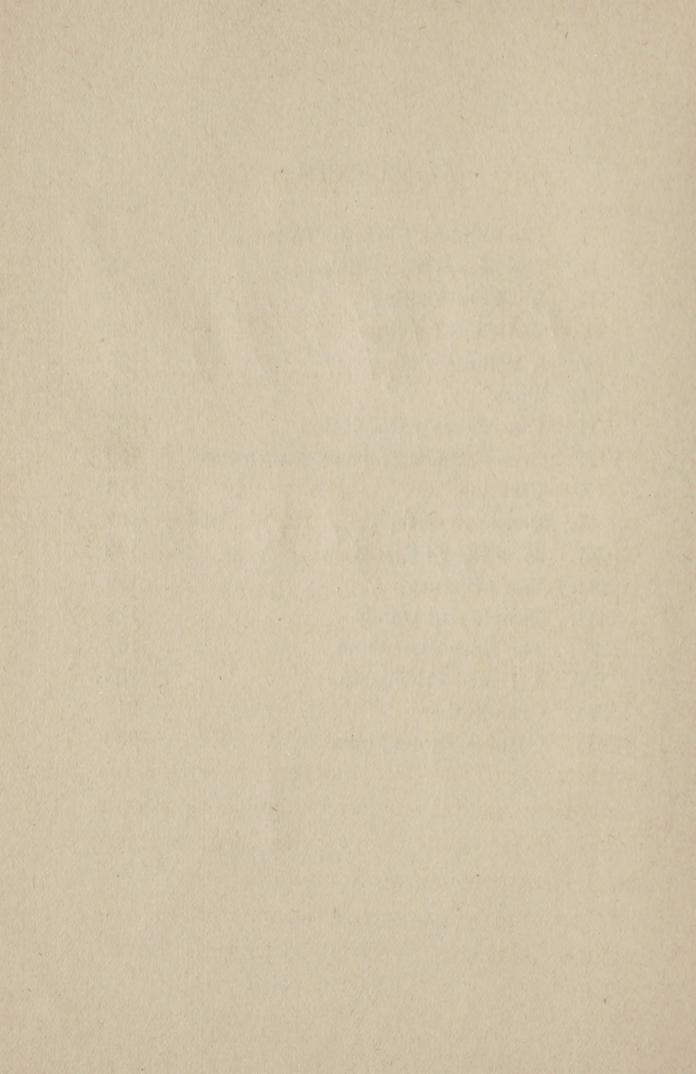
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### CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Shipleys Come to Town	1
II.	The March Wind Helps	15
III.	Joy Goes Visiting	29
IV.	Van Goes Driving	43
V.	A Volunteer Nurse	55
VI.	Plans	69
VII.	Van Makes a Resolution	85
VIII.	Grandfather's Shutters Are Opened	99
IX.	Vacation	113
X.	Bensie's Lesson	127
XI.	Miss Cora's Discovery	143
XII.	Van's Chance	159
XIII.	Dimple and Dandy	173
XIV.	The Education Fund	187
XV.	A Tested Friendship	203
XVI.	Grandfather	217
XVII.	"Home, Sweet Home"	233



## THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS

#### CHAPTER I

#### THE SHIPLEYS COME TO TOWN

It was a funny procession. Van Rensselaer saw it coming up the street and stopped at his gate to watch it. He was just out of school—Boys' Latin Preparatory—and carried an armful of books, which he laid on the square stone post at the foot of the steps. One didn't often see a sight like that on Schuyler Street, which was wide and paved and altogether stylish. The boy laughed aloud, though there was no one to enjoy the fun with him—there seldom was, for that matter. Most of his laughter was rather lonely, so there wasn't much of it. But then, it was a rare thing to see a procession on Schuyler Street.

This one began with a wagon full of furniture. Not an up-to-date van that looked like a house on wheels, but just a plain farm wagon drawn by two strong-looking horses that were evidently used to plow and reaper. The driver wore blue overalls and jumper and a battered felt hat, also a shock of tawny whiskers. Beside him, on the broad seat, was a boy with a face full of interest in the sights about him, with a brown-and-tan terrier between his knees. After this there was a second load, very much like the first even to the whiskers, only the boy was smaller and it was a huge black cat that shared his seat.

That wasn't all—no, indeed! It takes more than two vehicles to make a procession. In this one there were five, and the last one had a cow tied on behind—a good cow, too—Jersey, and plump as one of her own butter balls.

The last wagon supposedly held the family to whom all the other appurtenances belonged. It was a Dayton with three seats—all full. Father, driving, and mother, sitting in the rear, guarded their flock between them.

On the middle seat, looking straight at Van with a pair of dancing brown eyes, sat a girl a little younger than himself. She wore black curls about a gypsy face, her cheeks were like roses, and her teeth showed white and even as she smiled in friendly fashion. Van's hand touched his cap—it seemed as if one must acknowledge such a merry glance.

Then the procession stopped and Van looked ahead to see the cause. The boy on wagon one had clambered over the wheel and was making straight for the big gate of the Little Yellow House. A moment later it swung open and the horses turned in, followed by the rest of the parade. Van's lips puckered into a whistle. Never since he could remember had the Little Yellow House been lived in. It had stood there all alone in its thicket of rosebushes and wisteria, till it looked like nothing but a big arbor running riot. The very walks were so grass grown that the bricks were out of sight, and the little front gate would have fallen to pieces long ago if it hadn't been held up by a woodbine that tied it fast to the picket fence. Dwellers on Schuyler Street hadn't paid much attention to it—it was rather picturesque in its present state, and being the very last house toward the east, nobody minded that it wasn't big and stately like its neighbors. The paving stopped just in front of it, for out beyond there were only commons and open fields.

Now it was evidently to be used again, and Van felt a pleasant thrill as he remembered the bright-looking boys and the friendly girl. He lifted his books and went up the steps into the spacious grounds of his own home. Only a well-trimmed hedge divided these grounds from the overgrown lawn of the Little Yellow House, where things were beginning to happen. If Van had only known it, things always began to happen wherever the Shipley family put in an appearance. With a very energetic Mr. Shipley, an extremely busy Mrs. Shipley, and all sorts and sizes of junior Shipleys, was it any wonder? Already the shutters were being opened; already Star, the cow, was untied; Yankee Doodle, the terrier, was barking frantically; while Inky, the cat, arched her back and scolded at him.

Van hurried up stairs with an unusual sparkle in his eyes.

- "Somebody's moving into the Little Yellow House, Mother," he announced to the lady in the easy chair. She shivered.
- "I saw them, Van. Such a hopeless crew—isn't it dreadful?"
- "O, I don't know. I thought they looked rather interesting," the boy declared.
- "Interesting!" His mother repeated the word disgustedly. "Anything but that. Your father told me last night that old Mr. Pearce had leased the place. I have been hoping against hope all day that they would be at least possible. Though what could be expected from people who would rent that ramshackle?"
- "It's not so bad, Mother," Van said, trying to comfort her. "I've always rather enjoyed the old place over there."
  - "We will not enjoy it any more. Look

at that, Van. Actually a coop of chickens. What next?"

"Looks like rabbits," laughingly said the boy, watching the unloading of a home-made hutch. "There, they've unhitched the horses from the Dayton and are leading them back to the stable. I suppose they are to live there with the rest of them. Isn't it fun?" Mrs. Kingsbury left her chair and crossed to the couch. "Just one more trial for me," she said, sighing. "As if the old place wasn't bad enough at best, Mr. Pearce has piled these dreadful tenants there under our eyes. Surely I had enough to bear without this."

The boy at the window turned away. He spread an afghan over his mother's feet, straightened the pillow under her head, then drew the shade and slipped out. He had learned long ago that quiet was best for shattered nerves. But once in his own room he stood by an east window and watched with hearty interest the lively movements next door. "It doesn't hurt if I do look," he murmured, as if apologizing. "They're

out of doors, so I'm not—er—eaves-dropping. It must be jolly to have all that bustle and stir—all belonging to one family—my, but I'd like it. Look at that dog, would you? And there's a phonograph, as I'm alive! And a croquet set! That biggest boy hugged his mother when she came out on the porch just now and she hugged him back, even if she was busy. There's the girl—look at her apron and that dust cap. They sure are workers over at the Little Yellow House."

Perhaps it wasn't strange that Van found his neighbors interesting from the first. For one thing, they bore the charm of novelty. There were no gingham aprons or dust caps in the Kingsbury home — no bustling, busy mother, no troop of noisy children. There was a beautiful dwelling, to be sure. The Little Yellow House could almost have been set bodily into the suite of rooms to the east of the wide hall. There were lovely furniture and well-trained servants. But the mistress of the mansion was nervous and frail, its master a busy man who spent much

of his time away from home, and Van was an only child. That was all, except Grandfather, who stayed in his room among his books and with whom Van never felt very well acquainted.

Pets? Not one. A motor car doesn't need petting, you know, as horses would, while pasteurized cream in sterilized bottles is much less trouble than a Jersey or an Alderney. As for dogs or cats, they were not to be tolerated for a moment.

Van sat in the window till the farm wagons had all driven away. The whiskered drivers — evidently former neighbors — had called back jovial good-bys and good wishes. Van could hear their hearty voices as they disappeared. Then twilight settled over the Little Yellow House and lights began to glimmer in its uncurtained windows. They had an early supper — perhaps they were hungry after a busy day. The mother took things out of a big, comfortable hamper. Van could see her cutting bread and slicing ham. They sat around, anywhere, to eat — of course there hadn't been time to set a

table, yet, or unpack dishes. But they looked so merry and good-natured and the father patted the mother's cheek, right in front of the window, then the mother reached up to pat his shoulder. It was quite a reach, too, for she was little and slim and he was tall and broad. Something made Van's eyes smart just then and his throat felt queer. He stood up suddenly and said, "Calf!" right out aloud, though a calf was one of the few things that hadn't moved in to the Little Yellow House.

Then he went down to the dining-room, while the Japanese gong sounded its musical call through the halls, and he sat at a table where the meal was served in courses and a butler presided. Mother had on her diamonds and father was in full-dress. There was something very special going on later in the evening. But Mother wasn't happy, for the new neighbors had made her nervous, she said, and Grandfather frowned darkly when he heard of the children. Noise and books don't go together very well, and the Little Yellow House had been quiet so long,

it was rather surprising to have it come to life so suddenly.

It seemed very strange that with roast duck on one's plate and chocolate ice cream to come, one should remember the bread and ham next door and feel again a stinging in one's eyes. Yet, if you'll believe it, Van did.

Over in the Little Yellow House the picnic supper was being cleared away and beds made ready for tired limbs as fast as busy hands could do it. "I saw the next-door boy standing at his gate as we came by," declared Joy, plumping pillows vigorously. "Did you, Bensie?"

- "No didn't know there was a next-door boy," answered Ben, who was tucking in quilts as if used to it.
- "Well, there is and he's nice. Touched his cap like a gentleman when I smiled."
- "Joy, you never did—" Mamma Shipley stopped beating buckwheat batter to look shocked.
- "Yes'm, just friendly, you know. We've got to get acquainted sooner or later, so I

thought we might as well begin. I only hope he's got a sister my age."

"There's only one child, Mr. Pearce told me," said Papa Shipley, who was putting up the roller towel behind the kitchen door. "They are fine people, he says."

"There's a good deal to do to make things shipshape," and Mr. Shipley looked about on shabby walls and woodwork.

"Who's better able to do it, I'd like to know?" inquired Mother. "Eight of us, with two good strong hands apiece and all the time there is."

"Isn't it dandy it's spring? Just the right time to do everything." This from Joy. "Hold still, Bert. If you will have curly hair you'll have to bear pulling. It's one big snarl in the back."

"Cut it off. I wouldn't have curls if I could help 'em, would I?" Bert demanded.

"I guess not, but you can't, so hold still. Garden — there's a lovely big patch behind the barn — and flower beds — and the vines will need all sorts of trimming."

"There's paint needed badly," began Papa.

"Yellow," insisted Mamma. "Regular sunshine color, just like this house must have been once upon a time. It's so shady here and so viney, it needs that sort of paint to liven it up."

"Just as you say, Mamma." Papa always came to that remark sooner or later. "I rather thought of white, myself, with green blinds, but you know best."

"Sunshine color, Henry," Mamma repeated. "Now turn in on your pallets, every one of you, and get to sleep. We girls will sleep in the parlor, Joy. Put Dimple in the middle so she won't roll off the mattress. We'll leave the dining-room for the men people. Henry, don't let Dandy get uncovered — it's chilly in the night. Bless you every one and bless our new home. I hope the dear Lord will help us to make it truly sunshiny, inside and out—and ourselves, too. Let's ask him, dearies."

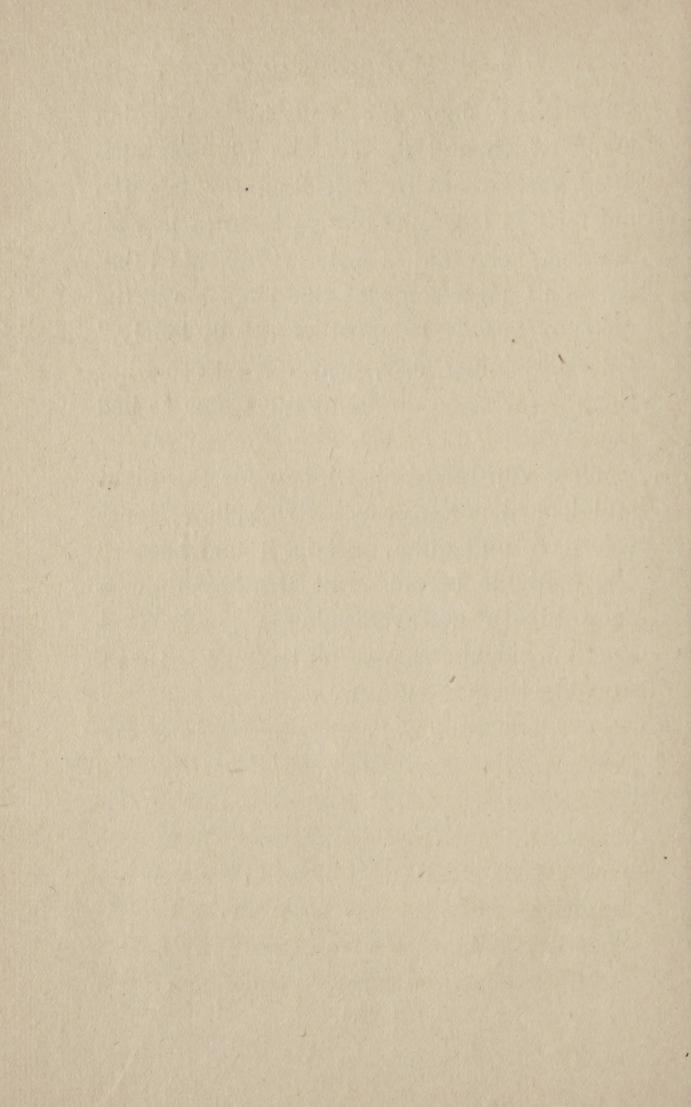
Joy stood at the window looking out at Schuyler Street, while her mother made ready for bed. The street lamps gleamed golden in two long lines as far as she could

#### THE SHIPLEYS COME TO TOWN

see. Next door the Kingsbury mansion loomed high and massive, its windows outlined everywhere by soft lights. "It's too big for one lonesome boy to have to live in, Mamma," she said at last. "I should think he might need some of our sunshine—the nice boy I saw. He must be awfully lonely."

"So he must, Joy, dear. We'll see what there is for us to do about it. Come to bed now."

When Van raised his window for the night and looked across, the Little Yellow House was dark and quiet, just as it had been so many nights before. But the boy drew a deep breath and remembered gladly that the new neighbors, with all their good times, would be there to-morrow.



#### CHAPTER II

#### THE MARCH WIND HELPS

The Little Yellow House was a very busy place for the next few days. There was a great deal to do. So much that if its new occupants had been less brave and cheery, it might have discouraged them. One might think that a house left to itself for several years would at least keep itself as orderly as its last inmate left it. But one would be very much mistaken.

There wasn't a door that didn't sag, or a window that would stay open—only the ones that wouldn't stay shut. Panes were broken out, and wind and weather had painted brown stains on the walls and rotted the floor. The front door, like the front gate, was sealed shut with woody stems and branches, while the garden space was inches deep with old growths of different kinds.

"But then, who cares?" demanded Joy as

Mamma Shipley looked sober over a hole clear through the parlor floor. "It'll be all the more like home when we do get it fixed to suit us, and having to work hard will keep us from getting homesick for the farm—which I'm not, Mamma Shipley. I wouldn't go back for anything." There was a challenge in the brown eyes, and Mamma met it squarely.

"Neither would I, Joy, dear. We came, because it was best to come. Do you suppose any of us would want to go back when it's best to be here? No, indeed!"

"Of course not." Joy stopped to examine a wounded finger — she'd been trying to pry the shutters open. "Papa'll get us mended in a jiffy, and the good times we are going to have — "This way of leaving her sentence hanging in mid air, as it were, made all sorts of lovely things possible, and Billy sighed happily before he announced from the doorway, "They've got a tennis court next door. I saw it from the barn loft — it's way around behind the house. I always did want to learn tennis."

"Well, please don't begin till we get acquainted with the people, Billy Shipley."
Twouldn't be polite."

"'Sif I didn't know that," replied Billy with withering scorn. "I haven't forgot my manners if I have moved to town, Joy. But I'm going to try to get acquainted pretty fast."

"I bet Joy'll beat you to it." Ben's face appeared above his brother's head in the doorway, grinning roguishly. "While you're scouting round the edges watching for a chance to get in, Joy's in the middle of the ring, having the time of her life. How about it, kid sister?"

Joy tossed her head. "I don't go where I'm not wanted, I'll have you to know, Bensie Shipley. But I don't believe in beating around the bush, if that's what you mean."

"No, you don't. Where's my straw hat, Mamma?"

"Packed away with the summer things, of course," was the reply. "You don't think I'm going to let you catch your death of cold wearing straw in March, do you? Go

on, boys, and get the grass out of those walks. There'll be something doing before tennis on these premises," and Mamma Shipley set a brisk example by getting the pruning shears from somewhere and attacking the vines that held the shutters fast.

Van, next door, moved slowly down the walk. School seemed anything but interesting when there was so much going on in sight of home. If only he could go over and join in—if only he could rake dead grass like that tallest boy was doing! There were strains of music in the air—early as it was, Joy had the phonograph going. "It doesn't take but a second to change the records, Mamma, and we can work faster while it plays real lively," she explained.

"It's the truth," agreed Mamma. "Play 'Dixie' till we get the boys started." It is wonderful what you can do when you are interested—and the Shipleys were, beyond a doubt. Van thought he was almost as much so. He watched the changes with eager eyes—pruned rosebushes, trimmed vines, a mended gate, clean walks—

something new almost every hour it seemed to him. He could not see what went on in the house, for shades were tidily hung now. But the Little Yellow House was constantly spilling its occupants into the big yard and there was plenty to be seen. Ben and Billy were at work on the barn where the horses, Dick and Dolly, and Star, the cow, lived. Bert was fitting up the old henhouse with nests and roosts, and even Dandy was doing something about the rabbit-hutch. Dimple, sunny-haired baby, roamed at her own sweet will among the troop, who stopped often to grab and hug her or drop a kiss on her rosy face.

Van couldn't keep away from the sight of it all. Even lessons waited till the shades were drawn, and only a dim outline of yellow light showed that beyond the windows the happy family life was going on. Mother refused to be interested. She had a siege of nervous headache during the first week the new neighbors lived there and didn't want to hear of the "noisy crew." Grandfather kept his blinds closed on the side next the

Little Yellow House, so he could forget "those people" were there. The south light in his room was hardly enough for his dim eyes, and the fancied necessity for shutting out the east light offended him and made him cross. So there was no one with whom Van could enjoy the Shipleys. If Mamma Shipley had once dreamed that behind the filmy curtains in the middle second-story room of the big house there sat a lonely boy, watching with eyes that often smarted, her own merry flock, and swallowing a lump in his throat when Dimple came close to the hedge—if she had known it, she would almost - perhaps quite - have gone across and begged him to come. But Mamma Shipley didn't know it - not then.

Joy often looked over and wondered about the Shining Palace, as she called it, though Ben took her to task for the title. "It don't shine—not so you could notice it," he declared. "It's a big, scowling pile of stone, and that's all. People? They must be Egyptian mummies—they don't come out where you can see 'em, like live folks would."

"The nice boy does — he goes to school every morning, and it is a palace, and it does shine. If you'd look out at night you'd see every window glowing with a soft, white light, not yellow, like our lamps. And the lace curtains make lovely patterns on the white shades. But, then, you boys are such sleepy-heads you never see anything after supper only dream people and Land o' Nod menageries."

"I'm afraid the young chap doesn't have any too lively a time of it," Papa Shipley said later to Mamma. "Mr. Pearce tells me that the Kingsburys are very exclusive, and the boy has few playmates, I judge."

"That's why Joy has been so interested," said Mamma Shipley with conviction. "Trust her for seeing through things. Poor lad, he must have some playmates hereafter. The children shall be more friendly."

Mr. Shipley smiled drolly. "Maybe it's as well the way it is, Mamma. It is possible his aristocratic family are not as much in love with the young Shipleys as we are,

honey." Mamma bristled up. "I'm simply ashamed of you, Henry!" she said severely "Our children are well-born and well-bred. What more could you ask?"

"Not a thing, honey, not one thing in all this wide world. Any flock that has you for its mother is good enough to associate with dukes and princesses." And Mr. Shipley meant every word he said.

"Well, then," said Mamma, "leave the rest to me—and to Joy. Of all pitiful things, one of the worst is an only child—especially a rich one. Poor laddie!"

It was the very next day that the frolic-some March wind came to Mamma Shipley's help in the matter. Dimple was out in the sunshine with her yellow curls hidden under an enchanting little blue bonnet, for the air was chilly and Dimple had been known to have croup. "Watch her, Joy, while you are weeding that border," said the mother as she tied the blue strings. "Don't let her go bareheaded, whatever you do." But the strings were in the way and Dimple tugged them loose just as the frolicsome breeze

came by. It stirred the sunny curls about the baby's neck, then gayly lifted the blue bonnet and tossed it quite over the hedge onto the wide lawn of the Shining Palace.

There wasn't a soul to hand it back, and for a wonder the boy Shipleys had all gone downtown with their father. The prickly hedge couldn't be climbed—so much was sure—and there wasn't a bit of a gap that one could slip through in neighborly fashion. Joy took Dimple in the house. "Her bonnet's clear over in the Kingsbury yard," she announced. "There isn't a way to get it only to go clear around and in their front gate. I hate to, really, Mamma."

"Well, Joy, if that's the only way, don't stand parleying — go get it. I want Dimple to be out all she can while it's sunny." But Joy was mistaken in thinking that no one knew her dilemma. Van, in his window, saw the little blue introduction sail over the hedge and waited for no second chance. When Joy stepped off the back porch, there he stood at the hedge, holding out the bonnet and smiling so happily that Mother

Kingsbury would hardly have known the smile for Van's.

"L saw the little girl lose it. You're welcome," he said awkwardly, half turned to go, then hesitated. He couldn't bear to start back to his quiet room so soon. "It's a — a nice day," he stammered.

"Yes, only windy," Joy answered, her own color coming and going. "Bother," she was saying to herself, "I wish Papa hadn't said that about their being — er — exclusive. Maybe he doesn't want—" Oh, but he did. He pointed to a tree near by and called attention to its swelling buds. Then to the grass at his feet, where a soft green tinge was showing. "I'm glad it's spring," he ventured. "And I'm glad you folks are here. This place would seem awfully lonesome if you'd go away again."

"Is that so?" asked Joy, smiling broadly.
"I'm sure you're kind to say it."

Van turned and faced her squarely. "Not half as kind as you are to be here. I've enjoyed it, no end — watching you, you know. You don't mind?"

The girl laughed out in a merry fashion of her own. "No, indeed. If you can see anything to amuse you in the Shipleys, I give you leave to enjoy it."

- "Thanks, that's good of you. Shipley—is that your name?"
- "Yes, it's all of our name, but we each have something else attached to it. There's Ben and Bert and Billy the three Bees, we call them, and it's a pretty good name, because they really do keep busy. Billy's got the sweetest disposition so we call him honey bee. Bert's got a temper, though he does try to control it, and he is improving, heaps. He's the stinging bee; and Ben is the worker bee. We haven't any drones."
- "I should think not from all I've seen," laughingly agreed Van, now quite at his ease. "And the rest?"
- "Daniel Dandy for short. He's our little brother and Dimple's the baby."
- "She's the one that wears the blue bonnet, isn't she? She looks like a fairy or an angel."
- "Well, she isn't either one, for she has a will of her own, and I don't suppose angels

have. And she's too solid to be a fairy. But she is the sweetest thing in this world — we wouldn't trade her off for mints and mines of money."

"I guess not. I know I wouldn't if she belonged at our house. But you didn't tell me about yourself."

"Me? I'm just Joy. I don't amount to much, for I'm pretty frivolous, I'm afraid."

"Joy Shipley. I like that," said Van honestly. "Is that all?"

"Of course Papa and Mamma come first—they're the best ever. And last comes the Noah's ark."

"The what?"

"Noah's ark — animals, you know. Horses, cow, cat, dog, chickens, and rabbits. There was a guinea-pig, but he died. Also some white rats, but Papa made Bensie give them away — they're sort of a nuisance. So we only have the other things left. Now tell about your pets."

"I haven't one," said Van, feeling very much ashamed of such a confession. "You see, I'm the only kid over our way and the grown-ups aren't much on animals. I wish they were — I'd love a nice dog, no end."

"Yankee Doodle isn't very nice — I mean, he's just a little brown terrier — but we love him anyway, and he's as smart as he can be."

"I know — I've seen him. He's a dandy. Is that all?"

"All? It's all the family, if that's what you mean. We moved to town so we children could have better schools, and Papa's got a big store to build. He used to be a contractor before he went on a farm, and now he's going back to it again."

"I see. How did you ever find the Little Yellow House?"

"I think it had been saving itself up for us. It's so exactly what we wanted and never expected to find. Of course it has to be fixed up a lot, but Papa knows how to do everything under the shining sun except what Mamma knows, so we don't mind if it is tumble-down. Now please tell me about you."

Van's face sobered. "There isn't a thing to tell—not interesting like yours is," he as-

sured her. "It's just humdrum over our way—school and then home and studies. Grandfather can't stand noise and mother mustn't get excited about anything. She has dreadful headaches if she does. She's got one to-day. She sends us all out—we can't do a thing to help her." The boy looked sorrowful and Joy's bright eyes clouded. "That's too awfully bad," she said. "Can't your father help her either?"

"Oh, dad doesn't know one thing about nerves. He says he hasn't got any. He isn't home much — his business keeps him away a good deal."

"I shouldn't like that," said Joy, decidedly, trying to imagine home without Papa Shipley coming and going.

"We don't always get what we like," remarked Van, sagely.

Joy looked thoughtful. "No, I suppose not," she agreed. "But we can help some by trying to like what we get."

## CHAPTER III

## JOY GOES VISITING

"Who said Joy'd beat us to it? Who's a true prophesier?" demanded Ben, laughing into his sister's eager face.

"Well, could I help it? Did I throw the bonnet over the hedge?" asked Joy with an air of injured innocence.

"Who can tell? I can't," Ben teased, while Billy wanted to know: "Why didn't you invite him over? I'd like to get acquainted with him. Say, it's lucky they shorten that name — Van Ren — what?"

"Van Rensselaer Kingsbury," Joy repeated with much precision. "I did ask him over, but he had to go back so he could hear his mother's bell if she wanted him."

"Our mother doesn't have to ring bells for us, do you, Mamma, dear?" and Bert laid a loving hand on the shoulder near by.

"No, Bert, boy. But I don't have dread-

ful headaches, I'm thankful to say. Did you ask him to come some other time, Joy?"

"Yes, I told him any time would be all right and he thanked me and said he'd love to. But, Mamma, he didn't say he would. I especially noticed that. Why do you suppose that was?"

"Had to ask permission, of course, and wasn't sure about getting it." Ben looked disgusted. "Aren't you glad we're not 'exclusive,' Billy?"

"M-hm." The speaker's mouth was full of popcorn.

"Well, I'm just as sorry as I can be for Van." Joy returned to her first subject. "He's a nice boy, just as I said all the time, but he's a perfect prisoner in the Shining Palace and in the Latin school. Think of it—as if English wasn't hard enough to learn."

"They don't speak Latin altogether, kid sister," Ben explained. "They come down to United States lingo now and then."

"Don't you suppose I know that?" demanded Joy. "But they must do more with

Latin than we do in ordinary public schools or else they have no right to call themselves by that name. Anyhow, I'm sorry for him."

"So am I, poor laddie," said Mamma Shipley, holding Bensie close to her side. "It's so lovely that there are six of ours. I wouldn't want an only child for anything."

"Well, we've decided on a way to make some money," Ben told them, changing the subject.

"Who's 'we '?" demanded his sister.

"Pops and us boys," was the reply, given with calm assurance.

"If Papa's in it it's all right," commented Joy. "How?"

"Pigeons," answered Ben.

"All of us?" asked Joy.

"Us boys, I said. Us and Pops."

"My patience, Bensie, talk about grammar—" Joy left the sentence unfinished and her brother reddened.

"Father, William, Burchard, Daniel, and yours truly. Is that better, your ladyship?"

"Much. You really ought to try to be more dignified if you are going to keep on being the oldest when I'm getting so tall," advised Joy.

"She's brushed up against aristocracy and caught the germ — the microbe — the what do you call 'em?"

"She's infected. That's what Dr. Brown said when I caught the measles from Dandy," put in Billy.

"Yep, that's it. Anyway, we're going to have pigeons."

"Where? when? how?" asked Joy, who couldn't bear to wait for slow details.

"'Not so fast, I beseech you, my friend,'"
quoted Ben from the old tale of the monkey
and the cats. "They'll be homers and can't
be turned loose. We'll build a flying pen
behind the barn with a pigeon house adjoining. We're going to begin with ten pairs and
buy more after we can afford it. They're
good money-makers."

"Please tell me how." Joy's voice was incredulous. "How can pigeons, shut up in a pen, make money? Their eggs are too little to sell; you'd better buy more chickens instead."

"We'd better do no such thing. The big

hotel downtown uses all the squabs it can get and pays thirty-five cents apiece for 'em. That's what the Shipleys are going to raise — squabs. Behold us, the future millionaires with flying pens that cover an acre of ground and other things to match. Supper ready, Ma, dear? Here's Pops."

"Now, boys, one thing must be understood," said Mr. Shipley, as he hung his hat on its hook. "No pigeon work is to be done till this place is in apple-pie order."

A chorus of moans was the only answer, but Mamma Shipley nodded. "That's as it should be, Henry, dear," she said. "Once let these children get interested in a new scheme and old ones are sure to suffer."

"There won't any old ones suffer this time, honey," Papa promised. "The Little Yellow House and all that belongs to it will be in order before the homers move in."

And so it proved. For though with the Shipleys to decide was to act, they believed in doing things properly as one went along. So visions of flying pen and feed boxes were pushed back in certain boyish brains, while

hoe and rake, wheelbarrow and shovel, took first place. It wasn't play, either, even though they made merry over it all. Each did his share — or hers — toward making the Little Yellow House the home of their dreams. No one was left out, for you may be sure Mamma and Joy were not behind the boys, and Dimple was chief sunshine maker for them all.

But somehow the little beginning of friendship with Van went no farther. Try as Joy would to see beyond the filmy curtains, Van was nowhere in evidence. She wondered if he were watching the Shipleys—himself unseen. "I guess they've forbidden him to associate with us," she declared at last. "I'm sure it isn't his fault, for he said he wanted to know us."

"Come to think of it, I saw a doctor's auto go up the drive as I passed there this morning," said Mr. Shipley. "It may be the lad who is sick."

It happened that Papa was right, for a heavy cold had laid Van up and frightened his mother. The next morning after the Shipleys discussed the matter was Van's first day out of bed and he made at once for his favorite seat by the window. Joy was transplanting pansies in the back border when he first caught a glimpse of her. He pushed the curtain aside and waved his handkerchief. She caught the gleam of white and waved back, then, acting on a sudden impulse, beckoned. Van shook his head slowly as if sorry to decline the invitation, then pointed to his dressing-gown, passed his hand across his throat, then his forehead, and leaned back in his chair.

"Is he having convulsions, or what?" demanded Ben, who saw the performance.

"I think he is trying to use the sign language, like the North American Indians used to do," explained Joy, who had been reading up on aboriginal history.

"I thought it was something heathenish," teased Ben. "Now maybe you can explain it, since you're so wise."

Joy was troubled and did not resent the charge. "I think he's sick," she said slowly. "I think he means he can't come out, and

I'm just as sorry as I can be. Bensie, it wouldn't be a bit of fun to be a prisoner, not even in a Shining Palace."

"You're right it wouldn't — not on your life," and Ben drew his lungs full of the sweet air and doubled up his brown fist. "Say, Joy, it looks like that Kingsbury kid isn't having a fair show in the world, doesn't it?"

"Indeed it does look just that way." Joy was most emphatic. "And it's up to us to see if we can't sort of help him some way. I'm going in to talk to Mamma."

It was fifteen minutes later when Ben saw her again. She was walking up the street in a crisp pink gingham, a pink bonnet on her black curls that was like Dimple's blue one only for the color, a white-covered something in one hand and a bunch of jonquils in the other.

Ben watched her curiously. "She never is — well, of all the nerve!" he exclaimed to Bert, then leaving the pansies to take care of themselves, he went to the house for an explanation.

Up the stone steps went the little pink [36]

figure as steadily as if her heart were not pounding in her ears. She rang the bell and waited. An extremely dignified man opened the door — a man with a dress coat on and a little silver card-tray in his hand. "I've come to inquire about Van," Joy explained in a very small voice. "He's sick, isn't he?"

The dignified man unbent a little. How could he help it when a face as sweet as a rosebud looked up at him from a bonnet the color of its own cheeks?

Yes, Master Van Rensselaer had been ill, but was better. Was there a message? The brown eyes opened gleefully. Half scared though she was, the visitor couldn't fail to enjoy this new experience. "I'm the message myself, if you please, sir," she said. "My mother sent me to see Van, with her love. May I go up?"

Had anything like this ever happened in the house of Kingsbury? Certainly not, so far as Godfrey knew. It bewildered him and he hesitated, hardly knowing how to answer. But Van had seen the little pink figure on its way and just at the proper moment a maid appeared to escort the young lady to Master Van Rensselaer's sitting-room. Up the stately stairs they went, Joy storing away all details to take home with her. It was a beautiful room where the boy sat, looking very pale and weak and young. Joy felt quite motherly as she laid down her flowers to shake hands.

"Bring some water in that tall vase, please, Marie," said Van to the maid. "How sweet they are! Let me have them here where I can smell them. How cool they feel, and soft. How did you come to think about them? It was awfully good of you."

"I didn't — it was Mamma. She thinks of everything for boys and girls — especially sick ones. Papa brought her a big bunch last night and she divided with you."

"Thank her for me, won't you? I oughtn't to take them away from her, though," and Van looked troubled.

Joy laughed. "I don't see how you can help it when she gave them to you. We had a big bed of them at the farm and Mamma likes them because they bloom so early. She says they seem so brave and cheerful, like little splotches of sunshine."

"So they do. I love them, too."

"Well, next year you can have all you want, because we'll have them of our own then, and you can come across and help yourself," and Joy nodded as cordially as if the "splotches of sunshine" already graced the yard of the Little Yellow House. Next she uncovered a dish and showed her host a mold of jelly.

"It's lemon gelatine. Mamma hoped you'd like it. We're going to have it for supper, but it's very good for sick people and she thought you might try to eat some of it."

"Indeed I will, and thank you and her! I'll come and thank her myself when the doctor lets me out. Now please tell me about everything. I haven't been so I could look over for a week and I suppose you've been doing heaps of interesting things."

Joy shook her head. "No, just plain everydays — cleaning and painting. Did you notice our new paint?"

"Yes, I did. It's fine — looks like the sun was shining in among the green things."

The visitor clapped her hands. "That will please Mamma most of all," she declared. "That's exactly the way she wanted it to look, and she says we ought to try to make it sunshiny inside as well as out."

"That's why she thought of me, wasn't it?"

"It's why she thinks of everybody—to try to make them all as bright as she can. I'm proud of Mamma Shipley, Van."

"Of course you are," the boy agreed.
"Tell me some more."

"Oh, let me see. Pigeons—we're to begin them next month. The boys are to raise squabs for the hotel. They are to build everything themselves, only Papa will help where they need it."

"That will be fun, won't it?" Van's voice was eager.

Joy considered. "I suppose it will be, but not all fun. There'll be some work, too. But we don't mind. Papa and Mamma think that what we work for we enjoy a lot better, and of course they're right."

- "Do you all work?"
- "Do we?" Joy laughingly answered.
  "Didn't I tell you there were no drones in our hive?"
- "Of course you've been busy getting settled, but after that's all done, then what?" Van's tone was curious. This was a new thought to him that boys and girls should work because they must, and yet enjoy it.

"Well, there's Bensie; he attends to Star—milks her and keeps house for her—the stable, you know. Bert and Billy take care of Dick and Dolly—good care, too. Papa won't allow the animals to be neglected. Dandy feeds and waters the chickens and bunnies. Mamma and I do the housework and sewing, and Dimple—she is the Queen Bee that rules every one. Papa slips in among us all and sees that everything goes right everywhere."

"I see — it's very nice." Van sighed and leaned back. Somehow the Shining Palace didn't seem near as attractive a place to live in as the Little Yellow House.

Just then the door opened and Mrs.

Kingsbury came in. She was a very handsome lady and her beautiful dress trailed long and soft behind her, over the velvet carpet. Van introduced his visitor and the lady greeted her politely, but Joy felt uncomfortable and her color rose.

Over in her own home a few minutes later, Joy hugged and kissed Mamma Shipley, and there were almost tears in her eyes as she said, "She's lovely as a picture, but oh, think of having nobody but a very dressed-up lady for your mother!"

In the Shining Palace Mrs. Kingsbury was saying: "She seems like a ladylike child, Van, and you may call and thank her mother. They mean well, no doubt, but people like that must be kept at a distance. Imagine those dreadful boys coming here!"

But even as Van imagined, he left out the word "dreadful."

# CHAPTER IV VAN GOES DRIVING

It was a fine spring morning when Van set out for his promised call; the air was a tonic in itself and the sun shone as it can shine only on spring mornings. Van noticed all the changes in the Little Yellow House as he walked toward it. He went slowly, for he wasn't strong, even yet. He had not realized how shaky he was till he started out alone.

"They haven't spoiled a thing," he declared half aloud. "It looks like a — a big birdhouse, just as much as ever, only it's cleaner and fresher." He went through the front gate, which swung on its own good hinges. The woodbine was still there, but it had been trimmed into shape — a clump on each side already greening into leaf. The walk to the house showed red and clean as brick walks should show, and not a blade of

grass crept beyond its border. Shutters hung tidily, the porch was white as paint could make it, and the brand-new bell on the front door shone like gold.

"I wish mother could see it all—close," the boy thought, wistfully. "She'd know what sort of folks they are if she'd once come up this walk. But, of course, she never will."

The door flew open to his ring with such hospitable haste that the visitor almost fell into Mamma Shipley's arms.

"Good-morning," she said cheerily. "You are Van, aren't you? I'm ever so glad to see you and I'm just delighted that you've come at this very time. Walk in and let me tell you all about it. This chair, dear. It's more comfortable. Feel a little weak yet, don't you? Joy, some of that grape juice, daughter, and a plate of cookies."

The boy hadn't said a word—he only beamed. Was ever so pleasant a welcome given to a stranger? Before he knew it he was in the biggest old Sleepy Hollow chair, with Mamma Shipley handing him a glass

of something delicious and Joy holding crisp, sugary cookies before his eyes.

"Thank you, no end. This is — is dandy!" he said at last. "I—I feel as if I'd been knowing you always."

"That's quite as it should be," Mrs. Shipley assured him. "How would you like a ride this glorious day?"

"A ride?" Van didn't understand.

"Yes, in the Dayton, behind Dick and Dolly. Mr. Shipley and the boys are going to the farm for some plants we left behind, and there's plenty of room for you."

Van's eyes widened and brightened. "Oh, I'd like that," he said. "You're sure I wouldn't crowd anybody?"

"Sure as sure." Mamma told him. "Joy and I are not going to-day, and the Dayton has held us all many a time. It will do you more good than a quart of medicine, lad."

Yes, it would. Van was sure of that. "I never do get to ride behind horses," he said in a burst of confidence, "though I love them."

"I shouldn't think you'd care for com-

mon animals like ours when you're used to your gorgeous automobile," put in Joy. "I never would get in an old Dayton if we had that."

Van shook his head. "It's no fun," he declared. "Mother doesn't go out much, grandfather's afraid of it, and dad's never home to go riding. Mother won't let me learn to drive it for fear I'll get hurt. You see, she's so nervous that she can't understand that there wouldn't be a bit of danger while Dick's there. He's our chauffeur."

"Oh, but think of the luxury!" Joy gave an ecstatic bounce at the thought, but Van failed to respond.

"No fun riding all alone in a big thing like that," he persisted. "I'd rather walk any old time. But live horses — they are different."

"Yes," agreed Joy, "I should think they were."

"Then it's settled?" Mamma Shipley rose.
"I must pack a few sandwiches. The boy
Shipleys are always hungry, Van. How
about the boy Kingsbury?"

#### VAN GOES DRIVING

"Sandwiches sound good to me," he answered grinning, though as a matter of fact he'd been eating very little of late. "But I'll have to tell Mother, first."

"Couldn't I take the message? I'd love to go over and see Godfrey again." Joy laughed roguishly.

Van sat back, relieved. Perhaps Mother would be more apt to consent if bright-faced Joy bore the request.

She was back in a flash. "I saw him — Godfrey," she reported. "He took my message to somebody and somebody said your mother said all right if you feel able. She is not to be bothered till she rings, because she's lying down. Isn't it too bad to have to lie down in spring daytime?" Joy sighed and shook her head, but Van looked cheerful.

"I don't think Mother minds," he said.
"She's used to it."

Just then they flocked in — the four noisy lads with Papa Shipley heading the procession and looking as if he was only a bigger and older boy, which, indeed, he was. Van fairly blossomed. In ten minutes he was

discussing baseball and the league games as loudly as Bensie, and telling which players he liked best in a way that surprised himself. Then they piled into the big, easy Dayton.

"Put Van in front with you, Henry," Mamma gave orders. "He's fond of horses and may want to drive some of the way."

The visitor gave a blissful wriggle, then remembered his "manners." "Maybe the others—"he began politely, but Papa interrupted: "Never mind the others this time, lad," he said kindly. "They can drive next week, maybe, or next month. Here we go." How that man managed it, Van couldn't have told, but Papa Shipley lifted the tall lad bodily and set him on the spring seat as if he'd been Dimple. If there was a gentle pressure of the kind arms about the slim body on the way up, maybe it was an accident—and maybe it wasn't. Papa Shipley felt very much as his wife did about "only" children.

Ben and Dandy sat in the middle seat with Billy and Bert in the rear, while Dick and Dolly in front fairly pranced to be off. "They're skittish as colts," said Mr. Shipley, gathering up the reins. "They haven't had much to do lately, and they're anxious to go. We're off, honey! Good-bye, girls!" and out of the yard they went, followed by a chorus of good-bys. Van looked back to see Mamma Shipley waving her apron, Joy her pink bonnet, and Dimple a dilapidated rag doll. He sent a glance across to the windows of the Shining Palace, but no one was in sight. He wondered whether Mother would approve of such a noisy departure. For himself, he thought it was the very best kind.

Drive? He held the reins almost every yard of the way, for the prancings soon ceased and the pair took up their usual steady pace. "They're dandies, aren't they, Mr. Shipley?" he said at last, with shining face. "Good goers, and they don't have to be urged, either."

"They'll do," Mr. Shipley smilingly answered back. "Pretty dependable, we have found them."

Such a merry ride as it was! Once out of the city and on the country road, the boy Shipleys let themselves go and sang or shouted, told jokes or related pranks, till the driver's sides ached from laughter and his cheeks felt strained out of shape. You see, neither sides nor cheeks were used to that sort of exercise.

Papa Shipley wasn't a bit better. The tales he told of his own experiences as a hunter for big game one northern winter were as thrilling as Van's books of adventure dared be. Then, there were the sandwiches and more cookies, and a stop at a crystal spring so tucked away under mossy rocks that only those who knew its hiding-place could have dipped their cup in its icy waters.

Finally came the farm itself, with all its treasures to be explored and displayed. The country dinner — chicken and dumplings, pie and cake, preserves with cream — was a revelation to the Kingsbury heir. Everything was put on the table at once and one set of plates, knives, and forks apiece did duty throughout the meal. But how Van ate! He wondered if anything had ever been so good before. If only Mother could have a bit of the "white

meat," so juicy and tender and sweet. Well, since she couldn't, perhaps he might as well -"Just one more piece - yes, and a little of the gravy." Potatoes? "One spoonful, and a turnip." Oh, if Mother Kingsbury could have seen his plate when he began and again when he finished! But perhaps it was as well she didn't, though it didn't hurt him - not one single bit. And when he got back to the Little Yellow House, he had room for an appleturnover warm from the oven. There were six of them waiting — the turnovers, one apiece for the travelers, and a big pitcher of creamy milk. They sat around the kitchen table and ate their lunch off a tidy red-andwhite cloth, and fed bits of crust to Yankee Doodle, and Mamma Shipley didn't say a word only, "Don't get crumbs on my clean floor, Dandy." You see, the Shipleys didn't have any company manners. They would have acted just the same if Queen Wilhelmina had come in unexpectedly to lunch as they did when it was Van Rensselaer Kingsbury. "Because," argued Mamma Shipley, "what is suitable for our own family is suitable for

#### THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS

our friends." And the friends all seemed to agree.

But there — something else had happened in the meantime. There were several things between the triumphal departure of the Dayton chariot and its return. It wasn't more then ten minutes after Dick and Dolly had spun through the gate — just long enough to get safely out of sight so they couldn't be called back — when Godfrey himself appeared at the Little Yellow House. Joy opened the door and stood looking at him, surprised, but smiling. He had come for Van, if you'll believe it! Mrs. Kingsbury's headache was coming on and it was her maid's afternoon out. She had forgotten that when she gave Master Van Rensselaer permission, and she would need him at home.

"Mercy me, Godfrey, he's gone this long time ago," declared Joy, divided between gladness that Van wasn't to miss his fun and sympathy for the headache. "Her maid will just have to stay in and go some other time."

A queer little look came across Godfrey's ['52]

lips. It looked almost like a smile, and he unbent enough to say to the bright-faced lass, "Marie wouldn't stay hin, Miss, not if the 'ole 'ouse 'ad the 'eadache."

Joy sobered instantly. "Now isn't that too bad?" she asked. "Is Mrs. Kingsbury very sick, Godfrey? I mean, is there much to do for her?"

"Sometimes they aren't hanything, Miss. Sometimes she's all for being quiet. Then again, it's hice water and hammonia. But if Master Van Rensselaer's gone, Miss—"

"He is—clear away. What time does Marie go, Godfrey?"

"One-thirty, Miss, till ten."

"I'm just as sorry as I can be. Maybe Mamma can think of something. She's very helpful, Godfrey."

"Yes, Miss. Good-day, Miss."

What Mamma Shipley did think of was surprising — to anybody but her daughter, who, being very much like the mother, had already thought of the same thing. At one-fifteen by the old hall clock that never went wrong, a little pink figure stole out of the

#### THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS

gate with the new hinges and up to the gray stone steps. When Godfrey opened the door, there smiled up at him from a bewitching pink bonnet a gypsy face framed in black curls with cheeks the color of a rose.

"I've come over to take care of Mrs. Kingsbury, Godfrey," the visitor said. "I came early enough so Marie could tell me what to do. Ice water and ammonia are easy, but if a person needs them, especially a sick person, it would be awful to do without."

And Godfrey gasped.

# CHAPTER V

# A VOLUNTEER NURSE

It was most unusual. Marie knew it as well as Godfrey did. But what could they do with a girl like Joy, at once so sweet and so determined? Mamma Shipley had sent her to take care of Mrs. Kingsbury, and to Joy that was enough.

Besides that, one-thirty had almost arrived, and Marie never let herself be late. So, since Master Van Rensselaer was away and the madam might need attention—at that, Marie glanced at the clock, shrugged her shoulders, and said, "Come, Mees—Shipley, is it not?"

"I'm Joy," corrected the visitor.

"Mees Joy — this way." Marie had a funny little French accent which Joy found most fascinating as she listened to the hurried directions. She was to stop quietly in the sitting-room unless a certain bell tinkled.

If it did, she should slip very softly into Mrs. Kingsbury's room and attend to her wants, whatever they might be. "She will not need so much — maybe not at all till the young monsieur return," Marie said finally. "Eet is kind of you. I will go."

Joy sat looking around the beautiful room and wondering how Van liked to be called a "young monsieur."

"It's extremely interesting. Let me see. I suppose I'd be mademoiselle." She pronounced each syllable in a way that would have opened French eyes in horror, then reached for a magazine that lay on the table. It was very quiet. Not a sound broke the stillness till the silence itself seemed to boom in her ears, which were used to the bustle of the Little Yellow House.

In the darkened room adjoining lay the lady of the Shining Palace with throbbing head pressed into her pillows and hands over her eyes to shut out the light.

"I wonder if Marie has gone," she murmured. "There must be a crack of sunshine somewhere. I can feel it to my brain. If

only I'd kept Van at home. Oh, dear, I do need someone."

She touched the electric attachment under her pillow and an instant later Joy stood beside her. Mrs. Kingsbury did not uncover her eyes.

"I'm glad you haven't gone, Marie," she said, moaning. "Do try to get this room properly darkened. The light is blinding."

Joy looked about her without speaking. A small, black silk scarf hung on the arm of a costumer near by and she reached for it. "I'm Joy," she said softly. "Marie went. The curtains are all down, so I'll just lay this over your eyes — so."

"That's better." Mrs. Kingsbury was too ill to be surprised at her new nurse. "My hands ache from covering my eyes."

"I'll rub them — like this." The plump little fingers, cool and soft, took hold of the hot, tired hands of the sufferer and smoothed them gently till their nervous twitching stopped. "I'm cold," Mrs. Kingsbury said, shivering. A silken comfort lay across the

bed and Joy spread it over her, tucking it gently in place, just as she had tucked sleeping Dimple's covers many a time.

"My temples throb so — Oh, Marie ought to have stayed with me today."

"I'm here," Joy told her. "I'll fix them." A pitcher stood on a stand and the girl poured out a glass of ice water, then dipping her fingers, she touched the swollen, aching veins. Softly and steadily she stroked them with a slow, even motion, over and over, back and forth. Dipping now and then in the cold water, she kept the slow motion up till the sufferer finally stopped moaning. Then the tense muscles relaxed and after what seemed a long time Joy could tell that her patient had fallen asleep. Joy did not move for fear of waking her.

It was very tiresome. The girlish fingers felt like wood and her arms were numb from the cramped position, but the slow motions kept on till at last Mrs. Kingsbury awoke, with a little start, and pushed the scarf away from her eyes. Dimly she saw an unfamiliar form bending over her.

"Why — who — where?" she gasped, bewildered for the instant.

"I'm Joy," the visitor said again, simply.
"I'm taking care of you till Van comes home."

"Have I been asleep?" was the next puzzled question.

"Yes, for a long time. Are you better?"

"I do believe I am. You have rubbed my pain away. Child, are you a witch or a magician?"

"No. Just Joy Shipley from the Little Yellow House."

The lady came to her senses then and stiffened. One of the dreaded "crew" here, uninvited, in her own private room! Could it be? Then she looked again into the sweet face with its dimpled chin and its broad white forehead, and melted. "You are a dear, anyway," she said, "whatever the rest may be."

"They are all dear—very, very dear," Joy told her, sitting straight. She had felt the sting of the words.

"Are they?" The question sounded [59]

amused and the answer was given earnestly.

"Yes, indeed. I'm really not half good enough to belong to Mamma and Papa, but I'm theirs, so they love me and try to make me better."

"Where did you learn to nurse?" was the next question.

"I never learned — I don't know how," Joy said. "But Mamma thought if it was just ice water and ammonia I'd be better than nobody. She said I should try to think how I'd like things if I had a dreadful headache, and not bother you with questions."

"Wise woman," said Mrs. Kingsbury, and Joy beamed. "At all events, she has a capable daughter."

"Yes'm. I'm glad you think so," said the girl, modestly.

"I wonder if I am really over this spell." Mrs. Kingsbury spoke as if to herself. "I never get relief before the darkness comes."

"Your darkness came early," smilingly remarked the caretaker. "It was lucky that

little scarf was there where I could get it. I suppose Marie left it on purpose."

"My dear, that scarf could have hung there ten years and Marie would not have thought of using it. I had never thought of it myself, but I shall not forget it again. It shut out the light completely. And no one ever massaged my pain away as you did. It is wonderful. But aren't you very tired?"

"Not to hurt. Can I do something else while I wait for Van?" Yes, she could help dress the lady of the Shining Palace in gorgeous dressing gown and pale-blue slippers, and lend her strong, young shoulder for a support while they walked to the couch in the sittingroom.

"I'm weak, but free from pain," Mrs. Kingsbury told her as she reached for the plump fingers. "You have a very magnetic touch, my dear."

"Yes'm." Joy didn't know what else to say.

"Will you come again when my head aches? I'll be glad to pay you well."

Joy drew back, hurt. "Mamma wouldn't

like that," she said. "The Shipleys like to be neighborly."

"Do they?" The invalid smiled queerly.
"I'm afraid the Kingsburys don't know a
great deal about that sort of thing."

"It's very nice to — to learn." Joy was half frightened at her own boldness, but it did seem such a pity to let the chance slip, for Van's sake.

"Indeed? Well, you ought to know." Again the queer smile and Joy twisted uneasily and looked across to the Little Yellow House that never had looked so dear as now.

"I'm glad — glad I live over there instead of in the Shining Palace," she told herself fiercely. "It's awful to have to be rich and not know how to be neighborly."

Mrs. Kingsbury heard the sigh and looked curiously at the little pink figure. "She's cleanly and tidy," she said to herself. "Her dress is neat and her hands are really aristocratic in shape and size. Tanned, of course, but small. Even if the others are hopeless, she has possibilities."

"Isn't there something I could do?" Joy
[62]

turned her eyes back to her hostess. "I'd like to, if I could."

"Aren't you content to be idle a while?" asked Mrs. Kingsbury. "It seems to me you have done enough for one day."

Joy shook her head, remembering the endless round of busyness in the Little Yellow House where Mamma was working away alone.

But before she could answer, Grandfather put his head in the door. It was a large head with long, thick white hair all over it, and very shaggy eyebrows under a forehead that looked as if all sorts of learning were stored up behind it. He looked rather fierce, for large blue glasses hid his eyes and glared like small-sized headlights.

"Genevieve, I want the boy as soon as he comes in from that ridiculous wild-goose chase," he said very positively.

"Very well, father," Mrs. Kingsbury answered, "if he isn't too tired."

Grandfather's brown smoking-jacket followed the head.

"Why did you let him go if you expect him [63]

to tire?" His voice sounded quite savage, Joy thought. "My eyes have given out and I want him to read to me. Not that he can read, but his droning is better than silence when one is in the midst of an important chapter."

"Very well, Father," said Mrs. Kingsbury again without looking up.

"It's most inconvenient to be obliged to wait," the old gentleman remarked, frowning, standing erect in the doorway and almost filling it. "Most inconvenient," he repeated.

"Could I do it, sir?" asked Joy, forgetting her homesickness in a new chance to help. The blue glasses came off, while their owner stared.

"Who are you, if I may ask?"

Joy felt that, old as he was, his manners needed mending, but she only said politely: "I'm Joy Shipley, over from the Little Yellow House. I read aloud to my father and the boys often. Perhaps I'd do till Van comes."

"If she reads as well as she nurses, she will [64]

be quite a success," Mrs. Kingsbury said kindly, and Joy glowed with pleasure. "She has taken excellent care of me this afternoon."

Old Mr. Atkinson considered, eying the visitor as if she were a new sort of curio. "She can't do much worse than my grandson," he mused aloud. "And I dislike exceedingly to wait. Suppose you come and try, Sissy."

The rose-bloom cheeks flamed. If there was one name above another that tried Joy's soul, it was Sissy. But she didn't say a word as she got up and followed the old gentleman into an immense room lined with books.

"Be seated," was the next command, and she perched on the edge of a green velvet rocker. "Second volume, fifty-ninth page—there at your elbow. Begin at the second paragraph and read slowly. Put some expression into your voice if you can. Van's is dun-colored when he reads—monotonous enough to distract one."

"Oh, Samuel Johnson — I know him.

Papa's very fond of him," said Joy, delighted to find an old friend.

"Second paragraph, page fifty-nine," he reminded her, and she began. For a long time there was no sound except her own voice. This was a good sign if she had only known it, for when Van read aloud, grandfather grumbled nearly every step of the way. But Joy didn't know it, and the silence worried her. At last she glanced timidly up at her listener. His glasses were off, his scowl was gone, and he was leaning contentedly back. "Go on," he told her as she stopped.

She quickly obeyed, thinking of the contrast between reading to him and to Papa Shipley. Papa always explained things as they went along and discussed them. It was this that had made his daughter an unusually good reader for a girl of her age.

Van found them thus when, fresh and rosy, he dashed into the room some time later. "You're to go home now, Joy. Your Mother wants you. I'll read, Grandfather, as soon as I see if Mother wants anything."

#### A VOLUNTEER NURSE

"You won't read to me to-night, sir," was the reply. "Our neighbor here knows how — you do not. You may come again, Sissy, and we'll have another bout with our old friend Johnson."

Van turned to look at her in the hall after the door was safely closed. "What did you do to him?" he asked roguishly. "He generally fires a book at me and turns me out bodily after I've been reading fifteen minutes."

"He said you didn't know how; maybe you'd better learn," retorted Joy. "It must be hard on his books to use them that way, and, besides, it's rather a good thing to be able to read."

Van chuckled — he'd learned how that very day from Bensie. "You're an all-round good sort, you Shipleys," he announced as he escorted her to the front door. "I've been gladder every minute to-day that you moved into the Little Yellow House and didn't stay on the farm. But say, that farm's a dandy."

Joy beamed. "Isn't it? We've had good times there. But we're going to have just as

good at the Little Yellow House — maybe better."

"I'm glad I went," she told her family later. "She needed me very much and so did he—the old gentleman. Anyway, he thought he did, and that's just as bad. But I'm gladdest because I found out for sure that Shining Palaces don't make people one bit better off than Little Yellow Houses do. I wouldn't trade with Van for all the money you could pile into one of their big rooms."

"I guess you wouldn't." Mamma Shipley caught her breath at the very thought. "Be an only child instead of one of six? I guess not."

"That's partly it," Joy told them, slowly.
"A whole lot more of it is, that I wouldn't belong to you and Pops. And besides that, if we were rich we wouldn't have to work and help each other along and feel so happy because we could."

It wasn't a very clear speech, but the Shipleys every one understood it, and every single one agreed. That was a fashion the Shipleys had.

## CHAPTER VI

### PLANS

"Joy! Joy Shipley! Where are you?" called Ben one balmy early evening. He had just come from the garden back of the barn, where Papa was weeding and Mamma was watering some young plants.

"Here me," answered Joy, imitating Dimple.

Ben rounded the corner of the house and came upon his sister sitting on the top of a stepladder. A hammer lay beside her, she held an old shoe in her lap, the big shears were in her hand, and her mouth was full of small nails.

- "Of all things, what are you doing?" demanded Ben.
- "Looking at my scratches," was the thick reply.
  - "Queer place to choose for that, it seems [69]

to me. Does it take all those implements?" and the boy perched on a convenient box.

"It seems to." Joy removed the nails to her apron pocket. "I don't believe in doing things just like everybody else does." She stopped to examine a long red mark on her plump wrist. "Ouch! that hurts."

"I should guess yes, from the looks of it. Want the witch-hazel to add to your collection? Say, girl, where does the old shoe come in? Charm for good luck, or something?"

"Bensie Shipley, haven't you got any eyes? Some people are the stupidest! I'm tacking this climbing rose to the wall where it belongs. Climbing roses are not supposed to grovel in the dirt."

"No doubt, fair maiden, but why the shoe?" persisted the boy.

"I'm cutting it in strips to tack across the runners. If you won't use your eyes I'll tell you that I hold the branch in place, lay a bit of leather across it, and tack both ends to the wall."

"I see. Both ends of the branch? Or, one of the branch and one of the leather?"

"Look here, Bensie, you know more than you pretend to. But the easiest way to learn a thing is to do it. I brought that box around here on purpose for you to stand on if you happened along."

"Unlucky happen." Ben pretended to pout. "I came to talk. I want to consult you about a very important secret."

Joy bounced gleefully. "Oh, goody! I love secrets. But you can be working at the same time. Let's get this thicket up where it belongs and then our consciences will be easy."

"Let 'em grovel for all of me." Ben sat still. "My conscience is already easy, thank you."

"It's calloused, as your hands got when you spaded the flowerbeds. Come on, Bensie — there's a love. Get the other hammer. I'll divide my shoe."

Two minutes later, as they tacked, the secret began to be disclosed. "We're going for the pigeons to-morrow," said Ben.

His sister looked disappointed. "That's no secret. I knew that before," she declared.

- "Yes, but you don't know the rest of it. Joy, do you remember what Mamma said when she finished up the parlor after we moved in here?"
- "Let me see." Joy considered. "She said it looked nice and she'd be satisfied if she had just one new rocker. Something like that, wasn't it?"
- "Yes, and she said she'd always wanted a certain kind—"
- "O, yes, I know. Pops said she should have it, then, and she wouldn't because we couldn't afford it. She said it took all Papa could earn to feed and clothe us and give us things we had to have, and fine rocking-chairs could wait."
- "Yes, that's it. But all the same, Joy, she ought to have it. There's nothing too good for her."
- "So there isn't, Bensie. But what can we do about it?"
- "That's the secret. The pigeons are going to help."
- "Now don't you go to counting on foolishness or you'll get disappointed. I'd like to

buy her gorgeous things as well as anybody, but I believe in common sense, Bensie."

"You don't say! Well, grandmother, perhaps you won't be so superior when you know that Pops thinks we can do it." Ben hammered his thumb in his earnestness and stopped to pet it a while.

"You told him, did you?" asked Joy, too busy to notice the accident.

"No, only that it was something we wanted to do by November — her birthday, you know. I'm going to spend my ten dollars for the pigeons."

"You goose, why don't you buy the rocker and be done with it? You could get a nice one for ten dollars. You remind me of what old Mrs. Grimes used to say — going all the way round Robin Hood's barn to come in at the back door."

"That's just like you women. You never understand business." Ben climbed back to his hammering. "If I should spend my money that way, the money'd be gone and I'd have only the chair to show for it. Mamma wouldn't like that and you know it.

But if I buy pigeons, they'll earn the money and I'll still have my original investment—the equivalent of my cash."

"Listen to the big words," Joy told a brambly branch. "How's all this going to be done? Squabs?"

"Yes, ma'am. They're very expensive to the one that buys 'em, but cost little to raise."

"You say Pops thinks you can?"

"Sure he does. He's been looking into the thing and so have I, and I tell you there's money in the business."

Joy stopped to think the matter over. Anything that Papa Shipley approved of was certain sure to be all right. Her tone changed. "I wish I could help," she said wistfully.

Ben reached over to pat the curly head. "You just shall, sister," he promised. "If you'll dress the squabs for sale, I'll pay you for it."

Joy shook her head. "Now that's silly, Bensie. If the hotel men would pay you thirty-five cents for your squabs and then pay me for dressing them, that would be something else. But if the thirty-five cents includes everything, how would I be helping by taking part of it away from you? It's awfully good of you, dear, and I love you for wanting to divvy up, but that's no go."

"That's so," agreed Ben slowly. "Let's see — what else? You make dandy ginger cakes, Joy, and the bakers charge five cents for six the size of yours. Bert and I bought a nickel's worth downtown last week, and they were gone in no time."

"Yes, I could do that. But, my patience, Bensie, who'd buy 'em? We don't know anybody near by, and, anyway, Schuyler Street isn't the ginger cooky kind after you pass the Little Yellow House."

"Wouldn't Mamma — of course not. You wouldn't let her, would you?"

"Pay for cookies made out of her own stuff and baked in her own oven? Not so you could notice it, Bensie." Joy laughed, then glanced across at her brother. "Don't look so doleful, sonny. You attend to your squabbles and I'll think of some way. I'm going to pay for a piece of that chair if it's only one rocker. Shoot that long fellow over this way — my, but he's a scratcher. Is your pigeon house all finished?"

"Just about. It's going to be all-round interesting."

And so it proved. The gentle homers who came to live in their new quarters next day soon became used to their owners and contented with their home. In the course of time several pairs of squabs delighted the Shipleys, from Papa to Dimple, and the only danger was that such precious pets could never be sold. But Ben steeled his heart against sentiment. Those baby pigeons were hatched to be eaten; therefore, eaten they should be.

Joy said no more about her own anxiety to earn some money. She was very determined; but think and plan as she would, there seemed no way open to her. Things went on in their usual routine. To be sure, the family was thrown into a little flutter of excitement when, on two occasions, Mrs. Kingsbury sent for Joy to rub her headache away, and both times she had succeeded in

doing so. Mamma Shipley explained to her that this was because her own freedom from nervousness and her cool, quiet touch soothed the patient and calmed her nerves so she could sleep and get the rest she needed. Then nature could cure the pain.

Joy was pleased to do this for Van's mother and was glad that nothing more had been said about pay. She didn't want to sell her "neighborliness," even to buy Mamma's rocker. True, Mrs. Kingsbury had sent home with her once a basket of choice fruit and the other time a plate of delicious cake. "For your Mother, Joy," she explained. "Thank her for lending me her helper." To Joy this seemed only proper—they had always exchanged such little courtesies with their neighbors. And if Mrs. Kingsbury knew how lovely Mamma was she'd be glad to show her attentions.

But it began to seem doubtful if Mrs. Kingsbury was ever to know anything about them, for the acquaintance progressed very slowly. Van went away for a month after his illness, which left him with a slight cough.

Billy's dreams of the tennis court were not coming true and seemed no more likely to than when he first knew Schuyler Street.

"I shall keep right on hoping to find some way to help on the chair," Joy told herself as she dusted the shabby best parlor rocker, one morning. "If I keep my eyes wide open, my chance will surely come sooner or later."

It was sooner — very soon indeed, for the bell rang loud and long that minute, and the "chance" stood outside. It was really old Mr. Atkinson, if you'll believe it. Joy opened the door and almost forgot to ask him in, in her surprise and embarrassment. He looked just as fierce as ever — not in the least as if he'd come to pay a friendly call.

"Why didn't you come again, Sissy, as I told you to?" he asked in his big bass voice, which was as big and as bass as if his hair had been jet-black instead of snow-white.

"I—I didn't know you wanted me," stammered out Joy.

"If I hadn't I shouldn't have asked you," she was told very firmly. "I wish you to

come now and read to me — yes, Sissy, this morning."

- "I'll ask Mamma to come in and see you."
  Joy was backing toward the door, but her visitor arose hastily.
- "No need of that. Don't er disturb her by any means. I'll look for you in, say, ten minutes.
- "If I can, sir," she said as she opened the door for him.
- "I suppose you should go," Mrs. Shipley decided after considering the matter. "We'll talk it over with Papa to-night and do as he says in the future. It seems discourteous to refuse an old gentleman. I presume he's lonely, poor soul."

It was about fifteen minutes later when the little figure appeared at the study door. This time it was dressed in white with a white bonnet on the black curls and a spray of red honeysuckle pinned on its breast. But the eyes under the shaggy brows were hidden behind their blue glasses, so no one could have told whether they softened at sight of the pretty picture. "Sit down, Sissy," he said. "Now before you begin, let's have an understanding. I believe in a business basis for every bargain."

"Yes, sir," said Joy.

"I want you an hour a day—say two o'clock to three—to read aloud to me. My eyes tire by two o'clock. I will pay you one dollar a week, but you are, of course, to come alone—no noisy boys or squalling babies following after. Now that's settled, let's go to work. Volume four, page eighty-six, third paragraph."

Joy's cheeks were very red as she said: "Excuse me, sir, but I don't think my mother would want you to pay me. She likes us to be accommodating."

"Your mother must be an extremely selfish woman, Sissy."

The dreadful words were almost drowned as Mr. Atkinson tapped with his cane on the floor to emphasize what he said. Joy thought perhaps she hadn't heard aright. "Sir?" she gasped.

"An exceedingly selfish woman, I said. It's a poor rule that won't work both ways, Sissy."

"I'm pretty certain I don't understand. My mother is the very unselfishest woman in all this world. My father says so, and, anyway, we all know it."

"Then she will not deny me the use of your voice an hour a day. If I can't pay for it, I won't have it. Why should I be indebted to you for kindness more than you to me? It's a business transaction or it's nothing at all. One dollar a week till further notice."

Joy considered. Looked at that way, it seemed as if there were two sides to the question. She'd have to have a little more time to think about it. She picked up the life of Samuel Johnson and opened to page eightysix. Then she hesitated.

"Mr. Atkinson," she said slowly, "if you'd please just call me Joy, I'd be ever so much obliged. It's really shorter than Sissy, and so it's easier to say. Anyway, it's my name."

"A poor excuse for a name, if you will permit me to express an opinion. There's no such thing as joy in this world — at all events, if there is I've never made its acquaintance."

The girl looked up with quick sympathy into the bitter old face. "It's too bad if she hasn't come to the Shining Palace," she said whimsically. "She lives with us in the Little Yellow House. I think that must be why I'm her namesake. Papa and Mamma have always known her."

"Most folks have lives of ups and downs. I suppose theirs is an exception — all ups and no downs?"

Joy felt the sarcasm and flushed. She remembered in a flash the plain furniture, the simple garments, the many makeshifts for economy's sake, in her own home. But after the sudden thought, she lifted her head proudly.

"We haven't so very much money, if that is what you mean, sir. But my mother says that even with heaps of money we might miss some of the things that are more important. And my father thinks so, too. So we are very happy — we truly are."

"Third paragraph, Sis — Joy." If the last word sounded more like an explosion than a proper name, that couldn't be helped. Any-

way, it was a start in the right direction, and Joy, looking demurely at the page, felt her lips twitch in a little smile. At least she wouldn't be Sissy any more, and — oh, the dollars there would be for Mamma Shipley's chair!

The problem was really solved then and there as she read the words the old man enjoyed. As for him, the blue glasses were off and the deep-set eyes were fixed on a sweet picture in the green velvet chair. If they softened as they looked, Joy didn't know it. Her gaze was fixed on the life of Samuel Johnson.

### CHAPTER VII

# VAN MAKES A RESOLUTION

The summer flew by as summers have a way of doing for busy people. The Little Yellow House looked very much like what Van had once called it—a big bird-house. For among its vines and climbing roses many wild birds had their nests, and their cheerful chirp and twitter blended with happy child-voices all the summer days. The garden back of the barn did wonders in the way of fresh vegetables, and the pigeons were thriving and content.

To Van, looking on, it seemed like Paradise all over again, and he longed to be on the other side of the hedge, playing croquet with Joy or ball with the Bees. Anything, just to be there in the happy bustle that never ceased.

But Van played fair, and when Mother forbade him asking the boy Shipleys onto his side of the hedge, when he was not to be allowed to share his games or pastimes with them, he would not accept their invitation to "come over."

"Joy is polite and well-mannered," Mrs. Kingsbury said, "but I can't be annoyed by those boys. People of that class rarely know their places, Van."

"What class?" the boy asked, a note of impatience in his voice. "They are just as nice as we are, every bit."

Then Mother sighed and told him not to be impertinent, and Grandfather added his protest against any familiarity. Father laughed when he heard about it and said: "What's the use of being so particular? Let him go, Genevieve, and let the other youngsters come." But "Genevieve" thought otherwise.

Even Joy's visits were little consolation, for she came and went strictly by the clock. For some time her acquaintance with Grandfather seemed to progress no farther than the beginning, for the few quaint little remarks she offered were not encouraged. Mrs.

#### VAN MAKES A RESOLUTION

Kingsbury's indifference to the dear family at home touched Joy's pride and kept her rather silent when that lady sometimes called her into the sitting-room. Altogether, Van's hopes of happy times with friends his own age were slowly dying till the measles happened. Dimple started and then Van followed, and Dr. James looked after them both. The other Shipleys had had their share earlier in life.

Long after Dimple was rollicking and frolicking out of doors again, Van was perched in his bay window easy-chair, looking wistfully across at his neighbors.

Mrs. Kingsbury followed Dr. James to the door one morning.

- "I am anxious about Van Rensselaer," she told him. "He ought to be out again by now."
- "So he ought, Mrs. Kingsbury, but he has no incentive to go. Doesn't enjoy motoring, he tells me."
- "Not alone, and I am too nervous to go often."
  - "How about those young folks next door?"
    [87]

was the next question. The doctor had kept his eyes wide open. "They would make excellent company for him."

"Those Shipleys?"

"The same. They are fine people, let me assure you, and I have seldom seen those children equaled for all-around, genuine worth, ma'am."

"I have never allowed my son to associate with people of that class." There it was again, and the doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"More's the pity," he said bluntly. "It's a 'class' that is well worth cultivating. As Van's physician, I prescribe a big dose of Shipley tonic, taken several times a day out of doors when the weather is fine. I'm serious in saying it's important. The boy needs just what he will get over there."

There was a great deal more said, back and forth, and the doctor finally left in a very bad humor, but the end of it was, he had his way. Even Grandfather stopped blustering when he knew Van's health was in danger, and as for Father, he settled the matter once for all. "You and they are to go and come as you please, Van," he said heartily. "Don't worry your mother, and keep your racket away from Grandfather, but outside of that, go the limit and let them help you, my boy."

It worked like a charm, and nobody really had any reason to find fault. For the Shipleys stayed at home most of the time, and when they did return Van's visits it was apt to be the tennis court that called them, and that was quite away from the house. But Van — well, he came as near living at the Little Yellow House as one could do who didn't stay there all the time. There wasn't a nook of that barn nor a corner of the pigeon house that he was not familiar with. Dick and Dolly nosed his pockets for apples and sugar whenever he came by. Star expected carrots as a matter of course. He gathered eggs, he fed the hens, he taught Yankee Doodle tricks — or tried to, which was as interesting to him as if he had succeeded, and perhaps more so to the dog. He and Papa Shipley were great cronies, while as for Mamma Shipley, he adored her.

He would not stop for meals because he didn't feel free to invite his companions to his own table. But there were never such currant buns or ginger poundcakes as those that found their way to his pockets every day. With it all his cheeks grew rosy, his hands tanned and muscles hardened, and Father looked on and encouraged the innocent friendships with all his might.

All this time Joy was regular in her attendance on Grandfather, whose windows were still kept shaded toward the east to shut out the sight of the Little Yellow House and its occupants. For the most part Joy didn't care. The dollars were piling up for a perfectly gorgeous birthday celebration and she could afford to be patient. Not only that, but the reading was doing her good, for grandfather cared for no flimsy tales, so she plodded her way through essays and history, literature and exploration, learning useful facts with every passing day. Crusty and selfish as the old gentleman seemed, he was really doing as much for the little maiden as she did for him, and of a more lasting benefit.

#### VAN MAKES A RESOLUTION

Though as to that, there were two sides to the question. For Joy's simple girlish ways, her love and loyalty for the dear home people, her faith in God and desire to serve him, these gradually made an impression she did not suspect. Slowly his gruffness softened. Sometimes the terrifying eyes grew more gentle, and once — will Joy ever forget it? — he told her to close the book at the end of forty-five minutes and talk to him about her "folks."

Before they realized it, schooltime had come and the troop must start out into the big, busy city and begin getting ready for life. And then it was October and the grapes were ripe on the thicket of vine that covered the side fence. Then chrysanthemums began to show color and the maples turned scarlet. Before you could believe it, November arrived and the birthday was close at hand.

Such planning as it took! It had to be done when Mamma Shipley was out, and this happened so seldom that the children had to watch their chance. She did have to go shopping once in a while, for Dandy and the "Bees" would wear holes in their shoes, and even the girls needed things sometimes. So when on November first she went downtown, the solemn meeting was held. Van was there, but they couldn't stop for that, because that was apt to be the case most any time.

Ben brought out his wallet and Joy her purse, Billy his savings bank and Bert his barrel. Dandy had a fat china pig, while Dimple, who didn't know in the least what it was all about, produced a penny from her mite of a Sunday-school pocketbook. "Bless her! Take it, Bensie. We can slip it back afterward — she doesn't know any better," whispered Joy.

It really surprised themselves when the large sum was counted. "It'll get her a corker," said Ben, impressively.

"Corker what?" asked Van.

"Rocker for the parlor. She wants it a lot." Joy looked up from a second careful counting of the treasure. "We can get the very one I hoped we could. I saw it last

week down at Dennett and Bond's. It's got a dear little footstool that's extra. I wish we could get it too, but we can't unless we take a cheaper rocker, and we won't do that."

"Oh, I don't know," said Billy. "The footstool would set it off, sort of elegant."

"So it would, Billy, but she can get along without that, and I believe she'd rather have the better chair while we are about it."

"We can buy her the footstool next year," suggested Bert.

"That would be lovely. It's the dearest—all polished little legs and brown leather top."

"Well, Joy, you and I will go after school to-morrow and order the thing up," said Ben, importantly. "We can hide it in the barn till the time comes."

"Yes, and get it all hayseedy and dusty?" Joy's question was indignant. "No, we'll order it sent up Friday evening after school, and we'll watch for the wagon and smuggle it up to my room till morning. She's always busy in the kitchen getting supper, then, and she won't see a thing. Oh, goody! I can hardly wait!"

"Doody! Hardly 'ait!" echoed Dimple, dancing with joy because everybody else looked happy.

"I shall bake my loveliest ginger cakes," planned Joy.

"Pops said he'd see that there was the finest lemonade ever," promised Bert.

"You see," and Joy turned to Van, "Papa doesn't know a word about the chair. It's a surprise for him as well as her. He doesn't know we could ever manage all this, and he thinks the birthday isn't a thing but ginger cakes and lemonade." And Joy giggled gleefully.

"Doesn't he know you have the money?"
Van wanted to know.

"Not how much we have. He knows we are saving, but he thinks it is for ourselves." Joy spoke in a happy undertone as if Papa might hear. "He thinks I'm trying for a kodak and the boys for sleds and skates. Just as if—" And she sniffed amusedly.

"Just as if," Billy took it up, "as if we'd spend all this on ourselves when our mother wants something!" "Guess not," finished Dandy, valiantly.

Van didn't say much. The birthdays he was used to meant gifts, an extra course at dinner, and a highly ornamented cake. But this intimate planning, this happy self-denial, was something quite new. His throat felt queer and choked and he got up and reached for his cap.

- "I must go," he said.
- "Well, you save Saturday afternoon for us, Van. You've got to come to Mamma's party," Joy told him.
- "Pops is going to stay home and fix up the kitchen sink like she wants it," Bert volunteered.
- "We'll have more fun than enough," added Billy, "and we want you, sure, Van."
  - "I I'll come, and thank you, no end."

The boy drew his cap over his eyes as he went up the street toward home. A new view of things had come before him.

"I've been feeling sorry for myself because I didn't have a home like the Little Yellow House," he murmured half aloud. "I've been wanting my folks to do things to make me happy, but I never thought about it the other way." He climbed the stone steps slowly. "They've been planning for half a year to give their mother a surprise. I never planned for mine, not half a minute."

Mrs. Kingsbury was alone when Van went into the room. Her head lay wearily back on its cushions and her eyes were heavy.

"Sick, Mother?" he asked, laying his fingers on her forehead in unusual tenderness.

"No, Van, but very tired and nervous. I couldn't sleep last night. How cool and nice your hand feels."

"Poor mother," he said softly and bent to kiss her.

Tears came to her eyes. "My boy — my darling," she whispered. Again Van felt the queer choke. Mamma Shipley often called her children darling — but then they deserved it, and he — Van — didn't. Perhaps that was why Mother hadn't said such a thing for such a long, long time. He stood behind his mother's chair and laid his fingers on her temples as he had seen Joy do one day.

Then gently he drew them down and back till he reached the throbbing veins on her neck. Then up again and down—gently, quietly, over and over, his heart swelling with new love for this suffering mother as he saw her nervous hands, so white and frail, lie quiet in her lap. "I never thought of her side of it—only of mine," he told himself more than once. "Never of hers—only of mine." The moments slipped away. Van heard Mrs. Shipley calling, "Come in, darling! Come to Mamma." He smiled at the pet name—the one Mother had used for him. He bent over and looked at her; she was fast asleep.

He sat down near her, moving carefully so as not to wake her. "She won't have a birth-day till next summer," he remembered. "But there'll be Christmas soon. I'll plan something she'll like — she and Dad. See if I don't, Van Kingsbury!"

He sat there till she awoke, looking so pleased and bright.

"It has done me worlds of good. That nap was just what I needed, but I couldn't

#### THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS

get to sleep. How did you happen to think of it, Van?"

The boy patted her fingers, which twined themselves around his brown hand. "I didn't think of it — not just that way," he said. "It sort of happened. But I'll think of it next time, Mother, dear."

"My boy, my darling," she said again, as Van, a new thoughtfulness in his face, stooped and kissed her.

## CHAPTER VIII

## GRANDFATHER'S SHUTTERS ARE OPENED

It's queer how plans can change in a very short time. One day you are certain sure that something is going to happen and the next day you find out that it isn't, at all. From the afternoon that Mamma went down town and the children thought out every detail of the celebration, it looked as if nothing could possibly occur to spoil the fun. Well, to be sure the fun wasn't really spoiled, but it came very, very near being — nearer than anybody liked to remember. And the two days before the birthday were not joyful in the least.

This is the way it came about. Auburn, the best-laying hen in the flock, would get out of the chicken yard. Nobody knew how she managed to do it so often, for Bert kept the fence in good order and she was thought

too heavy to fly over. But out she got and stole her nests, and then such hunts as they did have to find those eggs.

Auburn was a Rhode Island Red hen, and Ben dubbed her "Reddy" on first sight. But Joy felt that she deserved a better title, so renamed her "Auburn." True, even then Ben called her "Auby," but she didn't seem to mind.

The birthday gingercakes were to be made with Auburn's eggs. On that point Joy was decided. No others were so big and full and firm, and no others would do for Mamma's celebration. As usual, Auby was out, and as the boys were playing ball with Van on the side lot, Joy climbed into the loft to hunt the eggs. She had often climbed the little narrow stairs, but somehow to-day her foot slipped just as she reached the top and down she went in a heap clear to the bottom.

Dandy heard the noise and screamed—and then, of all the commotion! The Shipleys and Van flew to the barn, and in less time than it takes to tell it Joy was on the dining-room couch with cushions around her,

ammonia and arnica and smelling salts coming from every direction. But for the first time in her life Joy paid no attention to her family. Her eyes were fast shut and her face was as white as snowflakes. Mamma chafed and rubbed and talked, but Joy didn't respond and finally Mamma looked up with a face as white as her girlie's. "Bensie, go for your father and a doctor, as quick as you can fly."

"Let me 'phone for them, Mrs. Shipley. I'll have 'em here in no time," and Van hurried away, sobbing as he went — big boy though he was. For once he forgot Mother's nerves and Grandfather's quiet, and he burst in upon them almost as Billy Shipley might have done. They looked up, but the look on his face stopped their reproof.

"I'll tell you afterward — let me 'phone first. It's Joy — I'm afraid she's dead. Central, Home 240, quick!"

Did they wait to hear the rest? No, indeed. Joy had made a warmer spot for herself in those hearts than anybody had dreamed till that moment. Grandfather

started bareheaded, but Mother did remember his hat, though she herself had only a thin shawl over her beautiful gown. Marie wrung her hands and cried and Godfrey blew his nose like a trumpet and looked as if he was on the point of joining the procession to the Little Yellow House.

Into the plain little room they went, not even stopping to ring, and one instant later Mrs. Kingsbury had her arms around Mamma Shipley and they were both crying together. For the face on the cushions was still as white as snowflakes and the eyes had not opened. Grandfather thumped on the floor with his cane so fiercely it made them all jump.

"What is being done for the child?" he demanded. "Do something—do something."

"He's right. Let me go to her." Mamma Shipley straightened up bravely and wiped her eyes. "The ammonia again, Bensie. Don't cry, darlings. Sister will be better soon — Oh, she will, she will." Mamma's tears were falling again and the hands trembled as they bathed the purple lump on Joy's temple.

"Give her air!" thundered Mr. Atkinson.
"Every one of you get out of here except her mother and me. Genevieve, can't you see that her bed's got ready? She isn't comfortable on this thing. Van Rensselaer, call up the doctor again. There is no sense in this delay."

But there really was no delay at all, for even as he said the words the big auto puffed to the gate and stopped. Three minutes later a taxi puffed to the gate and stopped. Think of Papa Shipley riding in a taxi!

For the next hour there wasn't a thought in that house but Joy. Papa carried her to her room and he and Mamma and the doctor stayed with her. Mrs. Kingsbury trailed around the kitchen in her fine gown, fixing fires and boiling water, not forgetting to notice how spotless everything was, and orderly.

Grandfather gave orders right and left, like a commander-in-chief, with Dimple—the "squalling baby"—nestled in his lap, her sunny curls against his breast and his arm

tight about her. "You boys go do your work!" he roared at last, tapping again with his cane. "You'll be better off busy."

Mrs. Kingsbury turned to him. "Father, they can't work till they know about our little girl," she pleaded. "Could you, Father? Come here, you poor, dear laddies."

Would anybody have expected it of Mrs. Kingsbury? Down she sat on the couch, took Dandy on her lap, drew Bert to her on one side and Billy on the other. "Now, Bensie, you get a stool and sit here in front. We all love her and we'll wait together for the good news that is sure to come — soon now, Bensie, soon."

"Don't start them by sniffling yourself," scolded Grandfather, wiping his own eyes shamelessly. "Of course it will be good news."

And it was. Papa Shipley came creeping downstairs to tell them just as soon as there was anything to tell. "She is conscious," he said, trying to speak quietly, though he might almost as well have blown a trumpet

for all the success he made of it. "There are no serious injuries. It was the concussion that knocked her out. Doctor says we must keep her quiet for a day or two, but she'll pull through, all right. My children, shall we thank the Lord?" Right where he stood, he lifted his hands and poured out a prayer of thanksgiving while his boys sobbed softly and Mrs. Kingsbury sat with her arms about them all. Grandfather bowed his head on Dimple's curls and said aloud and heartily, "Amen."

Of course, Mamma didn't leave Joy any more that night, and what little time Papa spent away from her he hardly knew what he was doing. Grandfather looked about on the little flock and nodded at Genevieve. "We'll take them all home for the evening," he said. Van brightened — poor Van, who had sat alone in a dark corner feeling as if the sun would never shine again.

"No, father, they wouldn't want to leave home to-night." Mrs. Kingsbury knew boys, after all, better than some people had supposed. "You can go home now and rest after all this excitement. I'll stay. Lay the baby here. You'll be tired out."

"Who said I needed rest? You needn't fix a bed for this child, I prefer to hold her. She'd likely wake up and be cross if I moved her." Think of Grandfather trying to hide behind an excuse as flimsy as that! "Van, you'd better get over to your lessons, sir. I'll stay and see your mother home."

Van's mother looked at the boyish faces, still strained and anxious, missing the three who made up life for them, and her heart overflowed with love and pity. "We'll all stay and have a good time together," she decided. "Van, dear, run over and 'phone to father about it and tell Ann to — to — why, of course, to send dinner over here. Godfrey and Dick can bring it. Now no more dolefuls, laddies. Sister's going to be all right again, and we are all happy."

It was simply wonderful, even to the tray that went upstairs with everything on it that heart could wish. Papa and Mamma ate their supper in Joy's room and fed her the milk that was all she might have to-night.

## GRANDFATHER'S SHUTTERS ARE OPENED

Downstairs — O, such a jubilee as it was! Mrs. Kingsbury sat at the head of the table and Grandfather at its foot. Godfrey came and went, Marie flitted in and out, and even Ann looked in at the back door to ask how the little lady was "comin' on." The children behaved like cherubs, and Dimple, so far from being a squalling baby, never cried one whimper, but ate as daintily as a rich man's child might have done.

"We boys will clear things up — we know how, all right," said Ben, afterward. "We thank you heaps for all your kindness, Mrs. Kingsbury and Mr. Atkinson, and we won't forget it. I hope it won't make either of you sick."

"Well, it just won't," Mrs. Kingsbury assured him. "I haven't felt as well for a month. We will go, laddies, now that Mamma has sent for Dimple and Dandy. Get your lessons and go to bed like dear sensible boys, and if Joy needs us in the night, just you let us know, Bensie. Come, Van."

"They are lovely people," said Mrs. Kings[ 107 ]

bury, as they walked across. "I don't wonder you like to go there, Van. I hope they'll come soon to see you — us. Don't you, Father?"

"H-um," said Mr. Atkinson. "They'll do very well." But the very next morning his east shutters were flung wide open and they haven't been closed since.

It's true the birthday gingercakes didn't get made. But then, who cared? Wasn't there a perfectly gorgeous cake with fancy icing and even candles? Van brought it over himself, with his mother's love, mind you. She didn't stop at saying "compliments." There were two dozen carnations from Grandfather—half for the birthday lady and half for Joy. And right in front of the beautiful chair that made Mamma so happy she laughed and cried together was the very footstool the children had sighed for, its polished legs and brown leather top, all complete, and a little card tied on that said, "With much love from your other boy, Van."

Papa stayed home all afternoon and fixed the sink for his birthday gift. And there were the loveliest stuffed eggs for supper, nearly all of them Auby's. They found a nest full, in the hayloft. "She'll not play hookey again," Bert promised his sister. "I've clipped one wing so she can't fly over, and fixed the fence so she can't crawl under."

It was a beautiful birthday, after all. To be sure, Joy could only lie on the couch, still pale and weak and still with the purple spot on her temple. But she declared she wasn't sick a bit and was too happy for words.

Mr. and Mrs. Kingsbury came to call that evening, and of course Grandfather Atkinson. But, then, he'd been over half a dozen times in the past forty-eight hours, so the Little Yellow House was getting used to him. He kept his visits up too, all the winter, unless the weather was very bad. For after he found that Papa Shipley knew and loved his favorite books and could talk about them intelligently, it seemed as if he couldn't stay away. A hedge gate was hung before Christmas and both families made use of it—there were so many consultations between Van and the Bees!

However, for the young Shipleys, play had to be pushed far into the background. The city schools were much more exacting than the country one had been and not a Shipley wanted to stay at the foot of the class. Van was a help in many ways, being more than willing to impart his larger knowledge of modes and methods.

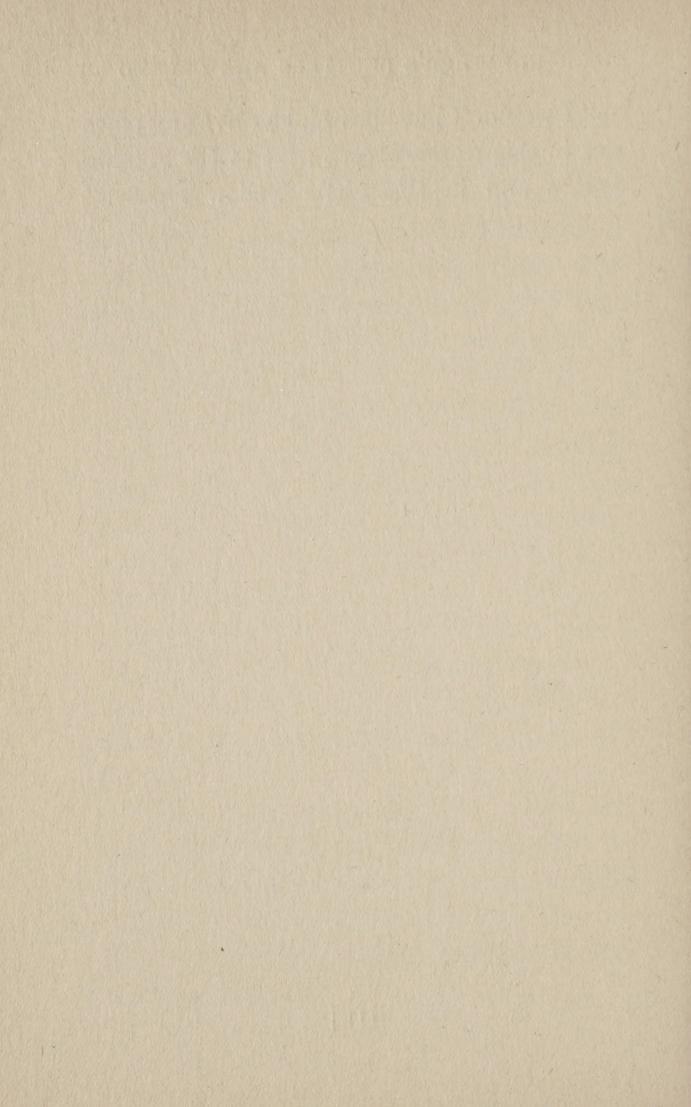
So the busy months flew by, holiday frolics slipping in now and then, when Christmas came and New Year, Valentine's Day and Washington's Birthday. And before they knew it the snows had ceased, soft winds began to blow and buds to swell.

At last Ben came in one evening from a long walk, with a tiny bunch of violets he had surprised in a sheltered nook. Joy was standing at the window and called to her brother.

"Come here, Bensie, and look. Now isn't that a Shining Palace?" she asked. The big house stood out against the clear, twilight sky, every window illumined with soft, white light—even Grandfather's, where the shutters were not closed.

## GRANDFATHER'S SHUTTERS ARE OPENED

"I wouldn't have us Shipleys live any place else in this world, except next to the Shining Palace and in the Little Yellow House!" And Bensie agreed.



# CHAPTER IX VACATION

"School is out, hooray! hooray!

Good-bye, dear teachers, good-bye,"chanted Bensie, tossing his cap in the air by way of showing his joy. Billy gathered up the refrain and Bert joined in, till by the time they reached the back porch, Godfrey was looking out of the dining-room windows next door and chuckling. The boys lined up on the step and kept on while Van — never far out of hearing — marched through the hedge gate, keeping step to the music. Joy appeared in the door, tying on her "home hair-ribbons" as she said, "Aren't you boys ashamed of yourselves? Just think how you'd feel if you hadn't any school to go to like the Hottentots and such people."

"Happy Hottentots," sighed Bert roguishly. "No school and no starched collars. Who wouldn't be a heathen?" "You're glad yourself, Joy. Don't play grandma to the bunch but come on out and help plan," and Ben sat down on the top step and beckoned over his shoulder invitingly.

"Wait till I put away my Sunday-go-to-meeting ribbons. Save me a seat," and the mentor departed gleefully, to return in short order and claim the "saved seat" between Ben and Billy while Bert perched just below with Van beside him. Dandy had Yankee Doodle on the grass close by and Dimple was chasing a butterfly, over on the Kingsbury lawn.

"Van's company, so let him tell first," said Joy politely.

A chorus of jeers greeted her assertion. Van turned on her accusingly. "Who said company?" he demanded. "Where'll you look for home folks, Joy Shipley, if you call me names like that?"

"Oh, very well. I thought maybe you had some vacation things to tell but if you haven't — Bensie, it's up to you." Joy tilted her chin loftily and Van subsided as he always did before that dimple.

"Of course," he remarked humbly, "I'm only waiting for a chance to tell you what the folks have decided to do. It isn't that, Joy, only it seems so sort of ridiculous to be — er — ceremonious to anybody that lives here almost as much as you do. We're going to Atlantic City."

Joy's dignity was forgotten. "Really? Oh, isn't that the most perfectly fascinating thing you ever heard of? Oh, you'll see the real live ocean, Van, and maybe bathe in it. And 'gather shells in days of yore!' like Mamma's old song. Oh, Van, how I do envy you Atlantic City."

"Wish you had it then — I don't want it," muttered the visitor rebelliously. "Been there you know, Ben, and it's not what it's cracked up to be, believe me. Dress up and put on airs — ride in little dinky chairs that a guy pushes, wear bathing suits that make you look like a — a Baltimore oriole, and then dress up some more. Excuse me!"

"Isn't he the most unreasonable boy in this world?" Joy appealed to her eldest brother, but Ben shook his head.

- "I don't blame him," he said. "Togs and airs are natural for girls, but boys—well, I'll take the old farm for mine."
- "So'll we—so'll we," agreed the other boys.
  - "Tell me about it," begged Van.
- "Bathing where you don't wear any suits," they obeyed.
- "Fishing and bringing home a dandy string for breakfast unless you take your frying pan along and cook 'em in the woods.
- "Overalls and gingham shirts and one suspender just one's all you need and a big straw hat. That's all."
- "Not quite." Joy joined in the eager recital. "There's more dewberries than you can gather, and wild grapes and gooseberries and currants."
- "And we pull corn and roast it in the hot ashes where we fry the fish."
- "Ever eat any roasting ears like that?" interrupted Bert. "You've never tasted any corn till you have any real, downright good corn."

Joy gave a happy bounce. "And wild [116]

roses," she exclaimed. "And boating. It isn't Atlantic City, Van, of course, but we do have more fun in the old boat — though it can't compare with what you'll have."

"And crawdads — say, they're dandy boiled and just pull 'em out of their shells and eat 'em hot, with salt." Billy smacked his lips and Van groaned, "Don't tell me any more. Are you all going?"

"Well, we aren't quite sure." Ben came back from cloudland with something of a thud. "Pops is going to try to get a vacation for himself but Mamma won't go without him and Joy won't leave Mamma alone with everything to do and Dimple couldn't go without Joy. So there you are."

"Us boys are going anyhow," announced Billy. "And the fun we'll have—"

"I should say you will," agreed Van. "I'll never forget the chicken we had for dinner the day you took me out there last summer. And that yellow gravy—just like gold. I asked Ann how they made it, but she didn't know—hers don't look that way."

"There's chicken every day if you want it.

And sometimes it's fried all brown and crisp so it sort of crackles on the outside when you shut your teeth down on it."

"Have a heart, kid, and change the subject. Looks like rain, seems to me."

Mamma Shipley at the sewing machine had been a silent listener to the children's conversation. The machine stood in front of the back upstairs window and the clear tones went straight to her.

"Poor, rich Van," sighed Mamma Shipley. "It isn't enough that he's an only but he has to have a lot of money besides. No wonder he doesn't want to hear about the Shipley frolics since he can't be in them. Why—I wonder if he can't—I'll certainly see Mrs. Kingsbury today if Henry approves."

Henry did, of course, and as soon as the afternoon work was done, Mrs. Shipley changed her neat striped gingham trimmed in white pipings, for a pretty dotted percale, trimmed in pale blue pipings. Then she slipped through the hedge gate and over to the side door which Godfrey opened with speed. Godfrey approved of the Shipleys.

Mrs. Kingsbury was in her sitting room and called her neighbor in. "It's an unexpected pleasure to see you here in the daytime, busy woman," she said cordially, as she pushed the easiest chair into the bay window. "Now do sit down and fold your hands and rest. I should think you'd be worn out."

"Thank you ever so much, but indeed I'm not tired," declared Mamma cheerily. "I love to be busy, you know, and I am thankful for my work and the strength to do it. Isn't this the prettiest room! I never come into it without admiring it all over again. How's the head, this week?"

"It hasn't troubled me much. But I do begin to feel run down and weary and we are planning a trip to Atlantic City, Father, Van and I. Oh, no, Mr. Kingsbury can't be persuaded to go. A big hotel with nothing much to occupy one's time doesn't appeal to a business man like my husband." Mrs. Kingsbury glanced across just then to where Papa Shipley was marking off ground for a new flower bed, surrounded by his flock and her own Van. Mrs. Shipley's eyes followed hers

and shone as they looked. Then she turned back to say briskly, "Please don't think me meddlesome, dear Mrs. Kingsbury. It's only that I love Van and think it would do him good. Our lads are going to our farm for five or six weeks and it occurred to Henry and me that Van might like to go, too. Oh, no, we haven't mentioned it to him."

"Indeed, Mrs. Shipley, I have no doubt he'd like it, but whether it would be best" — Van's mother hesitated and her neighbor chimed in.

"You needn't decide now. It's the merest suggestion, you know, and if you don't care to consider it we'll let the matter end where it began. The people on the farm are our tenants—just an elderly, plain couple who will take good care of the lads yet offer no restriction to their fun. Billy is a trifle thin this spring—growing fast, you see—and Bensie is longing for the country, so we are going to spare them awhile and the rest of us hope for a visit ourselves later on."

It was just here that Grandfather Atkinson took a hand — Grandfather who had come to

believe in the Shipleys as heartily as Godfrey had. "Van go? Genevieve, I am astonished that you hesitate. Can't you see he needs it? Such spindle-shanks as his are! And his muscles — why Ben Shipley's biceps would make two of his, Genevieve. How are you, madam? Is my young reader coming this afternoon?"

Mrs. Shipley nodded and smiled. "I'm very well indeed, thank you. Joy will be over as soon as I go home. She's keeping Dimple out from under Henry's feet while he works, though Dimple is getting too big to need looking after. We forget that she is a year older than she was last spring—just as we all are. And of course a year wiser—just as we all ought to be." The little woman smiled and rose.

"Mrs. Kingsbury, you can let me know if you decide to have Van go and I'll arrange with the Evans. The Bees and Dandy are to start next Monday week." Then Mamma Shipley went home to be hailed as if she'd been gone a week while her neighbor looked again through the window at the little procession that hurried to the hedge gate as

#### THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS

Mamma came through, and smiled — then sighed.

When Father joined forces with Grandfather that night, Van's cause was already as good as won. And so the new clothes and the Baltimore oriole bathing suit were laid away in the big clothes press in the Shining Palace and into a suit case went — could you believe that Mother Kingsbury packed it? — overalls, madras shirts, canvas shoes and a stout pair of suspenders — since one cannot buy less than a pair at a time. Father took Van on the shopping tour when the new outfit was bought and they had certainly never had such a chummy time together since Van could remember. There was a strong jack-knife in the blue denim pocket and a box of fishing tackle beside it. "None of your fancy stunts," Father told him, chuckling as he picked it out. "This is the sort of outfit I used when I was a kid and — look here, Van, you needn't be too much overcome if you see your dad looming up on the horizon out there for a fishing frolic, one of these days." And Van gasped, speechless with bliss.

Such radical change of plan was a bit hard on Mother, but she bore it very well indeed. She could hardly help it when Mamma Shipley was so sweet and cheery and Van so full of joy you might have thought no cloud would ever dim his sky again. The Monday came, the Dayton drove away, and the vacation of Van Kingsbury's life began. Two weeks later the three girl Shipleys arrived with Papa and — oh, it seemed too good to be true — but Mr. Kingsbury was on the back seat with Joy and he stayed all that day, which was Saturday, and bless you! didn't speak of home or business till Tuesday morning.

That Monday every blissful dream came true. The fishing and catching (because fishing and catching don't always go together) and then the dinner in the woods. Mamma Shipley fried the very perch they'd caught and Papa cooked what Mr. Evans called "roas'n' years," and baked big potatoes beside the corn in the ashes. The three Bees brought June apples from the orchard and roasted them and Mamma actually made corn pone,

wrapped it in the green corn husks and baked it under the coals.

"Dad, I never knew things like this were in the world," sighed Van when he couldn't hold another crumb.

"I used to know it, son, but I'd forgotten, more's the pity," and Mr. Kingsbury wiped his fingers on a grape leaf napkin. "Let's not lose track of such good times any more, eh, kid?"

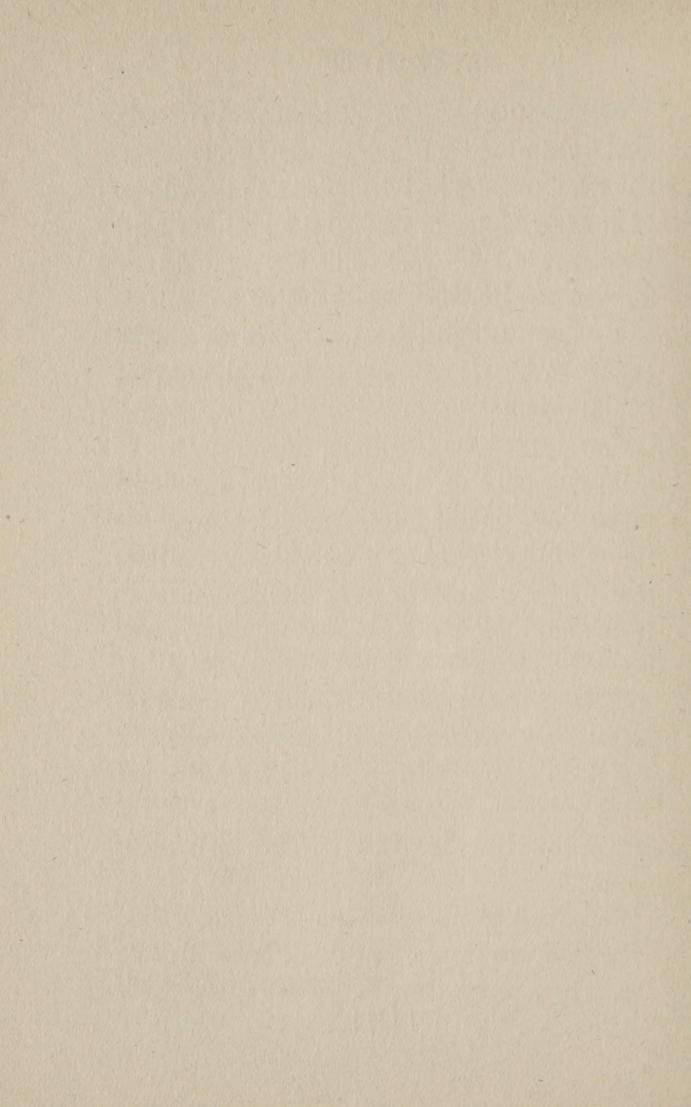
"I hope we won't, Dad," agreed the boy happily.

There wouldn't be time to tell all about everything because each day would make a story of its own. To be sure, it wasn't all play, for there was stock to be tended and hay to be raked. There were fences to be mended and weeds to be pulled, and the boys were expected to take a hand. Many a night Van crept into bed with aching back and smarting palms but never once did he sigh for Schuyler Street. He didn't even remember to mention bee sting or blister when he wrote the letters which looked so imposing to simple Mrs. Evans, addressed to Mrs. Van Renssalaer Kingsbury, Atlantic City, N. J.

#### VACATION

Perhaps the best part of it all to Van were Dad's visits, which began to occur every week, when he, too, donned overalls and pitched hay with Mr. Shipley or mowed the lawn for Mrs. Evans. He held wool while Joy wound it — for the sweater she was learning to knit — and as for Dimple, he was horse or camel, chariot or bear, according to the whim of that young princess.

Van looked on with delight through the long, sunshiny days, and at night lay down beside Dad on the sweet-smelling straw beds where both slept as no imported hair mattress had ever seen them sleep, and awoke with appetites that would have astonished Ann and shocked Mother. Van and his father were getting acquainted.



## CHAPTER X

## BENSIE'S LESSON

"I wish September never had to come," Dandy was sitting on the old couch, strapping his schoolbooks together and looking disconsolate.

"September is a very useful month, I think," said Mamma briskly. "If we jumped right from August into October, I'm afraid there'd be a good deal of damage done to fruits and nuts, not to say a word about boys."

"It's the boys I'm talking about," grumbled Dandy. "I wish we could skip September."

"I do, too. It's no good. Talk about pitying the Hottentots—" Bert didn't finish. He was having troubles with his own bookstrap.

Papa looked up from the Evening Herald When he saw those two cross faces, he laid the paper down. "Lads," he said. His voice

was kind but it held a tone the boy Shipleys never disregarded. "Is it school you are objecting to?" he asked. Mamma nodded over her sewing and the pucker between her eyes smoothed out. Things always fell in line when Henry took hold.

"Yes, Pops," confessed Bert. "We've had such a good time at the farm where it's all out doors and — and —"

"And now we want to help Bensie fix a bigger flying pen, and—"

"And our ball field's all full of weeds and they need cutting and—"

"And we've got to start in tomorrow, while it's bright and sunny and get shut up in a stuffy old schoolhouse and spell c-a-t cat, and all sorts of stupid things," and Dandy cast his books from him with a wrathful gesture that even Papa's watchful eye did not prevent.

"Lads!" There it was again, still kind but very decided. "No more of that, either in word or deed. If our vacations spoil us and unfit us for work, then we'll cut out the vacations."

## BENSIE'S LESSON

Two horrified gasps greeted this remark. "Cut out vacations," he repeated. "You've had six weeks to cultivate your bodies and get them strong and vigorous. You've stored up energy and muscle, you've learned things you never knew before about Nature and her wonders. What did it all amount to, lads? Anything more than the moment's good time?"

"Y—yes sir." Bert answered uncertainly. The good time had been so very good.

"You know about the bears that hibernate all winter, living on their own fat. Well, you boys hibernate, too, in a sense. You store up mental strength in your care-free summer to consume on your studies the rest of the year, and shame on the fellow who isn't willing to apply the rich store to its rightful uses. You are fine and fit. Now go to work and build a strong, clean row of foundation stones into the character you are erecting."

"But Pops—" Mr. Shipley raised his hand at the complaining tone.

"No objections, Bert. None in thought or [129]

#### THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS

word, remember. Try to cultivate as hearty an appetite for your education as you had for Mrs. Evans' fried chicken this summer. Minds grow strong on proper mental food just as bodies do on bread and meat. Learn to enjoy it, lads, and you'll be glad as long as you live. But until you have learned, neither grumble nor find fault. It's wrong and unmanly." Mr. Shipley picked up his paper again and the boys finished their preparations in meek silence.

"It's going to be very interesting," Joy announced after school next day. "I've got a new teacher and she's perfectly fine. And, Mamma, she's a stranger here and is homesick already. Can't I ask her over for supper real soon? She is Miss Cora Swayne — I always did love the name Cora."

"You can depend on Joy. I wager she knows Miss Swayne's grandparents' given names — or will before this time tomorrow." Ben laughed teasingly as he twitched a black curl near by. The head where the black curl grew gave a little toss and the pink cheek turned red. "Well, if she told me she was

## BENSIE'S LESSON

named for her Grandmother Swayne, was that my fault?" demanded Joy. Her brothers shouted and Mamma came to the rescue.

"There's one thing you can say for Joy, sonnies. She never uses her interest in people to do them harm. It's always a kindly interest and ready to be helpful if it can."

"Thank you, Mamma, that's dear." Joy cuddled her hand into the busy fingers that stopped stitching to return the caress, while the boys nodded and owned, "That's so."

School opened early that fall and the prospects were for more serious work than the Shipleys had so far known. A year earlier they were strangers and the novelty kept them interested — now there was only the outlook for earnest study. "But I'm ready for it," and Bensie threw back his square shoulders as if anxious to do valiant battle.

The Little Yellow House didn't require so much attention as at first, since all about it had been put in good order. Mrs. Kingsbury often looked across at the tidy premises and wondered how she could have objected to the

#### THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS

Shipleys as neighbors. But that remark doesn't really belong just here, only to show why the boys had more leisure for study. They used it well, too. For in spite of the grumbles with which Bert and Dandy had ushered in their school year, they soon got into the spirit of the times and went to work in earnest. Bensie had visions of leading his class, Bert excelled in arithmetic, Billy never failed on geography and even Dandy decided that September could be endured if it had to be.

Because the Shipleys had a good record, nobody was prepared for the trouble that came later, and of all persons it was Bensie who was in it. It began with Trent Berger's microscope. He brought it to school to examine some biology specimens and spent the morning recess entertaining the boys with its wonders. "It's my father's," he explained, "and it's a dandy. Look at this pollywog's eye, Shipley." Ben gazed in speechless amazement. He had never seen a microscope before, but what wouldn't he give for such a magic instrument! He spent every

# BENSIE'S LESSON

leisure moment that day with Trent and got many glimpses into wonderland.

"You fellows that want to can come around to the house any old time," Trent told the boys. "My father likes to have folks interested in such things — he won't care."

"I'm going," Ben told his family. "I promised Trent I'd be there tomorrow. Pops, you ought to see it. It's like looking into a brand-new world when you get your eye screwed to that little bit of glass. Rainbows on flies' wings, ostrich feathers on their legs—oh, I wish we had one of our own!"

"Well, why can't we have?" demanded Joy, who had listened open-eyed. "My savings bank's empty — I'm not using it any more. Let's start a microscope fund in it and the whole family help."

"That's not a bad idea, Joy," Papa approved. "I shouldn't mind adding a dime of my own, now and then, to so good a cause." So then and there the Microscope Fund began. But while it slowly grew, Ben was paying frequent visits to Dr. Berger's and coming home with new tales for the interested Shipleys.

"Are you sure Dr. Berger is willing for you boys to flock to his study," asked Mamma one day.

"We don't flock. There are only three of us who go — Charlie Brown and Dick Drake and myself. The other fellows don't seem to take much interest," Bensie told her. "But we'll have to stop soon because the Bergers are going to Europe soon, Trent and all. So it's good-bye microscope for Benjamin Franklin till the fund gets a move on itself."

In the hope that this last would occur soon, the savings bank was emptied of its contents every night and the bits of money counted "to see if anybody's put some in today." But after a while the subject dropped. Suddenly Bert's suggestion that it was time to count the money was crossly dismissed and next day the bank was pushed out of sight on the big shelf. "Well, of course if you don't want us to help—" began Joy, but Mamma shook her head. Mamma, too, had seen the change in Bensie and was waiting for his own explanation.

It came in a most unlooked-for way. Two

# BENSIE'S LESSON

days after Ben had pushed the bank out of sight, Professor Richards made a startling announcement in school. He said that Dr. Berger's microscope had disappeared. He had received a letter from the doctor, who had missed the little instrument just before starting for the train and too late to institute a search. The letter was postmarked New York.

"The microscope was in its place that morning," Professor Richards went on to say, "And the only ones who had handled it in the meantime were three members of this class. I cannot believe that one of my students has been guilty of this misdemeanor, but I owe it to you all that the three on whom suspicion seems to rest should have immediate opportunity to clear themselves."

There were times when that schoolroom was a noisy place, but this was not one of them. After a pause of breathless silence, the teacher spoke again. "Charles Brown, have you any knowledge of the whereabouts of Dr. Berger's microscope?"

"I have not sir, and I don't believe any of our fellows have." Charlie's voice was un-

### THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS

hesitating and a wave of relief swept over the class.

- "Richard Drake, have you?"
- "I sure have not and I think it's an insult for the old Doc to suspect us." The speaker's face was crimson and his attitude threatening as if ready to wreak vengeance on his accuser on the spot.
  - "That will do, Drake. Ben Shipley?"
- "I—I'm sure I don't, sir. I have a microscope but it isn't Trent's—I—bought it." Ben stammered and turned white. His teacher stiffened.
  - "You bought it? Of whom, may I ask?"

Ben's knees shook so he could hardly stand as he realized his embarrassing situation. "I—I'm afraid I can't tell you, sir, but I'll give it back if—if it's Trent's." The boy laid it on the desk and Professor Richards examined it critically.

"I believe this to be the missing article," he said after what seemed an age, and his voice was cold as ice. "If so, it has been unlawfully obtained. I find it in your possession, Shipley. If, as you say, you

# BENSIE'S LESSON

bought it, you can hardly refuse to tell who sold it."

- "Indeed, sir, I can't tell that."
- "Then there is but one conclusion left for me to draw. I am shocked beyond measure, Shipley. In spite of your evident desire to possess an instrument of this nature, I would as soon have believed this theft of almost anyone I know."
- "But you don't think I stole it!" Bensie's face was like marble.
  - "I don't want to think so, Shipley."
  - "I told you I bought it."
- "But you will not explain the circumstances of such purchase. Excuse me, Shipley, if I doubt your statement. Since the instrument has been returned, I will take no further steps in the matter, except to remark that unless you can prove what you have said, you will not, of course, return to my class. That is all, Ben. You may go. The class will come to order."

Ben looked about him beseechingly, but there was no help in sight. He gazed longest at Dick, but that boy's eyes were intent on his algebra and Bensie stumbled down the aisle as if he could not see his way.

For the second time since they could remember, the children saw Mamma cry that afternoon. The other time was when Joy was hurt. She took her big boy in her arms as if he'd been Dimple or Dandy, and dropped tears with her kisses on his pale face.

"My child not honest? I'd trust you against all the world, Bensie boy," she sobbed.

"Oh! will he go to prison, Mamma?" asked Joy, trembling so she dropped the cup she was holding and let the fragments lie as if nothing mattered any more.

"Oh, not prison, Mamma," wailed Dandy.
"I'll tip the policeman down the cellar stairs if he comes here."

Papa found them thus a little later. He was very grave as he heard the story, confused as it was. Then he lifted Bensie to his feet. "Stand there, son, and tell me all about it," he commanded. "If you had kept nothing back from us, this could not have happened. From whom did you buy the microscope?"

"I can't tell, Pops. I promised not to."

- "Such a promise was wrong. You must tell me, and at once."
- "From Dick Drake, then. He said it belonged to a friend of his who was tired of it and wanted the money instead."
  - "You paid him?"
- "Yes, with money out of the bank. That's why I wouldn't let Bert count it because I'd promised not to tell."
- "Why was such a promise necessary, may I ask?"
- "Well, Dick said the fellow's folks would be mad because he sold it so cheap and he didn't want them to find it out. But he said his friend had a right to sell it if he wanted to. Why do you look so stern, Pops? It was the money we'd saved for that purpose."

Papa Shipley mopped his forehead as if it was summer time. "This is a very grave affair, Ben, and my only consolation is that it may teach you a needed lesson. It's crooked on the face of it—the whole transaction, and I'm disappointed that you didn't see it."

"But how could I tell? Dick Drake's a nice boy," Ben defended himself.

### THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS

"This Dick Drake is a scoundrel in the making." Papa thundered as his boys had never heard him thunder. "Any boy who would keep silence and see a comrade suffer for his own wrong is—is in a dangerous condition. It will be an act of mercy to introduce him to himself, as I intend to do. Son!"

"Yes, Father."

"Never again covet your neighbor's possessions. Don't think you can purchase for one dollar articles worth several, unless some one has been crooked. And don't have dealings that you can't confide to your parents. Put on your cap and we'll call on Professor Richards."

"Now? Oh, Pops —"

"Now, son. The Shipleys don't leave a stain on their honor longer than is necessary."

Ben never forgot that interview. His teacher was kind, but neither he nor Ben's father made light of the seriousness of the mistake.

Then the three went together to see Dick.
[140]

# BENSIE'S LESSON

He attempted at first to deny his dishonesty, but finding it useless, finally confessed all.

"I knew Ben wanted one and I knew he'd be just guy enough to believe whatever I'd tell him," he jeered. Papa Shipley's fist doubled, then straightened again as he saw Bensie glare. "Bergers were going away and I didn't think they'd miss it till they got back and then they'd think it disappeared while they were gone. Berger's got plenty of money to buy more microscopes—I needed the money and he didn't. Golly, but you're a mollycoddle, Shipley. Why didn't you keep the glass and say nothing?"

"Because he is honest, young man," said Mr. Shipley, fiercely. "Honest people don't want what doesn't belong to them. There are to be no more references to this matter on your part, so far as my son is concerned. Kindly remember that. But, lad—" the gray eyes softened—" if you'll take my advice you'll right about face now, and start in the other direction. One wrong step, you know, needn't carry you far—let me urge you to turn the other way."

- "I'll think about it," said Dick, lightly.
- "While you are thinking, frame up your confession," said Professor Richards, sternly.
  - " My confession?"
- "Tomorrow at school you will tell the class what you have told us, and make public apology for your cowardly treatment of Shipley.
- "Ben, I'll expect you back as usual and I'm glad to retract all I felt obliged to say today. I'll make it right with the class tomorrow. Good-bye, Mr. Shipley. Glad to know you, sir."
- "Come, son. This episode is ended. Suppose we don't talk microscope for a while," suggested Papa.
- "Not till I'm old and gray-headed, unless I feel different from what I do now," and Bensie shivered. "But jolly-day, Pops, I'd hate to be in Dick's place."
- "There's a verse in a Book that never makes mistakes, which fits his predicament perfectly," said Papa Shipley. "It's this—I hope you'll remember, son, 'The way of the transgressor is hard.'"

# CHAPTER XI MISS CORA'S DISCOVERY

While Bensie was going through his hard experience and trying to learn the lessons Papa told him it should teach, Joy was having, as she expressed it, the time of her life. She had adopted Miss Swayne on sight. It had only needed the knowledge that the new teacher was a stranger and homesick, to enlist Joy Shipley's sympathies. It happened that Miss Cora was as much attracted to her scholar, so the Little Yellow House frequently opened its front door to let the teacher in.

They all liked her — all admired the pretty yellow hair and blue eyes and the dainty way she did things. So when Joy announced one afternoon that Miss Cora was coming to supper, there was approval expressed but no surprise.

"This isn't just a visit—it's something

## THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS

very important," twinkled Joy mysteriously. "Something perfectly fascinating is going to happen if Mamma'll let it."

"Well, indeed I don't see how I could have the heart not to let it, if it's all that," laughed Mamma. "Though perhaps if you'd tell a person a little bit more it would be easier to decide."

"She will, Momsie — she's only waiting to be coaxed," remarked Dandy with a superior air.

"'Deed I'm not waiting for any such thing and of course I'm going to tell. We're to have a big class entertainment after the holidays and I'm going to be in it."

Joy waited for the announcement to make its proper impression and was quite satisfied, for Ben looked up from his book, Billy stopped whittling to hear more, and Dandy let Yankee Doodle get entirely away from him, though he'd almost persuaded him to stand in a corner and beg.

"What are you to do, dear?" beamed Mamma. "Sing, I suppose, in the choruses."

"No indeed, nothing so common as sing-

ing. I'm going to recite a long piece of poetry all by myself. I think it will be Hiawatha's Wooing. That is so—so effective. Miss Cora says it is."

"But it seems rather grown up for you, doesn't it?"

Mamma's objection was brushed aside. "No, I don't have to be Hiawatha. I just have to tell about him as if I'd tell you about Dr. Sylvester's sermon or talk about Mr. Kingsbury out at the farm."

"True," assented Mamma.

"And the rest of the important thing—the part that Miss Cora is coming to talk especially about, is—oh, I do hope you'll say yes." Joy paused for a joyful giggle. "It's elocution lessons for me, and she wants me to take them, very much indeed. She thinks they're really necessary, Mamma Shipley."

Mamma looked amused. "Isn't this necessity rather sudden?" she asked as she scratched gathers in Dimple's little petticoat.

"It's been here all the time, only we didn't know it," answered Joy, gravely. "Mamma, I never *could* elocute like Flossy Gains does. I'd rather just sit still in my desk till I'm grown up and graduated."

"What's wrong with Flossy?" asked Billy.

"I thought you and she were great cronies."

"We are good friends," Joy corrected her brother with some dignity. "But I do not like the way she — she elocutes."

Ben laughed. "Her star of ambition is in the ascendant," he quoted. "It's only been two weeks since I heard Joy admiring that same friend when she recited, 'The boy stood on the burning deck, Eating peanuts by the peck.' Or, perhaps it was some other classic — I may forget."

"You don't forget — you do it on purpose," said Joy, placidly. "It was 'The Marseillaise.' There, Mamma, didn't I pronounce that better? But listen, Bensie, what do people go to school for if not to learn?"

"What, indeed?" echoed Ben.

"If I've learned something about recitations that I didn't know two weeks ago, isn't that all right?"

"It sure is, fair sister."

"Well, then, I have. I've found out that Floss makes her gestures like machinery. First she waves her right hand, second she waves her left hand and third she waves 'em both. Then she does the same thing over again. At first, when I hadn't seen much reciting, it looked nice. But now — well now it doesn't. Though I like Flossy just the same and I wouldn't say this outside of ourselves."

"Joy is right, boysies," said Mamma. "She is not criticizing her friend unkindly, but it is proper for us all to try and avoid mistakes we see in others. There comes Miss Cora, Joy. Let her in."

It was, as Joy had said, a very important matter. Miss Cora insisted that her pupil possessed great talent and that it was a shame to "hide it under a bushel" as it were. "She'll make her mark, Mrs. Shipley, if her ability is cultivated," the teacher declared. "The way she has developed under the slight instruction I've been able to give her, makes me feel certain that success lies ahead of Joy's efforts. And her expression is simply

wonderful for one so young and untaught." Joy flushed proudly, while Billy struck an attitude behind the door.

"Go set the table, daughter. Boys, take your books upstairs and finish your lessons there. Dimple, you can help sister." Mrs. Shipley disposed of inconvenient listeners, then went on, "We have no money to waste, Miss Cora, and we intend to cultivate Joy's singing voice a little later. To her father and me, it has seemed that she has more ability for music than other things and we have planned to have her taught."

"Oh, but Mrs. Shipley, this will only assist in the other," argued the teacher. "Elocution lessons would be the greatest help in her vocal studies and I have my heart set on Joy's being the star of my class entertainment."

"Thank you for your kindly interest in our girl. Her father and I both appreciate it." Mrs. Shipley sewed serenely on. "But I must ask you, dear Miss Cora, not to intimate to Joy that there's any question of her being a star or anything else conspicuous. We'd

rather keep her unspoiled than have her aspire to do ambitious things."

"Indeed I will be careful," Miss Cora promised. "I know you are right, but she's such a dear and I'm so proud of her I can't help showing it sometimes."

"Thank you. Mr. Shipley and I will talk this over and decide as soon as we can. Will you have this magazine while I run out and mix some tea biscuits? There is an article on kindergarten work that is very interesting."

But, after all, there wasn't much consulting done, for Papa Shipley was quite willing. What Miss Cora suggested, Joy desired and Mamma approved must be right, so the matter was settled at once and the lessons began.

If ever a class had an ambitious teacher, Miss Cora's class was the one. The plans she made for her entertainment would have appalled an average school-ma'am in the beginning. But instead of that, Miss Cora's plans expanded and Joy came home daily with a fresh budget of news to discuss.

But after a month, Joy's high hopes began [149]

to droop. "I can never do Hiawatha like Miss Jamieson does him—not ever in all this world," she exclaimed one weary day.

"You couldn't expect to, daughtie. Miss Jamieson is a teacher of elocution and you are only a very young student," Mamma reminded her.

"I don't care. Then I ought to do very young student poetry and not what I am doing," persisted Joy. Mamma's eyelids flickered. They had a cute little way of doing that once in awhile when she was thinking things all to herself that she wasn't telling anybody. But she only said, "I think your teachers must decide what you shall do, Joy."

"Yours not to reason why, Yours not to make reply, Yours but to do or die, Noble Joy Shipley," paraphrased Ben, striking a tragic attitude and making his sister laugh—which was what he wanted. Bensie didn't like puckers in Joy's forehead.

So the lessons went on. Miss Jamieson seemed satisfied with her new pupil's progress—at least she said nothing to the contrary; Miss Cora was enthusiastic, but Joy fell quiet

and began to change the subject when the entertainment was being talked about.

Van was studying piano, as he had done for several years, and was making good headway. He had many plans for himself and Joy.

"When you're a prima donna and I'm a virtuoso," as he sometimes said, "however well I play, I'll always do your accompaniments."

"Why, of course." Joy was matter-of-fact.

The better you play the nicer the accompaniments would be."

"But some artists won't," Van told her.
"Some artists feel that it's beneath their dignity to play for even prima donnas to sing.
But I'll never do that when you're the singer,
Joy, because I think so much of you Shipleys."

After so much pleasant planning Van didn't take kindly to the elocution idea. "She's no more able to get up on stages and rant, than—than I am," he declared with scorn. "She's cut out for a singer, Joy is, and she'll never recite fit to be heard."

"Will too." Joy's answer was extremely short. "I should think my own parents and

my teachers ought to know, Van Renssalaer Kingsbury."

"Your teachers ought to but they don't. Your parents do, but they're letting you try it because you and Miss Cora have got your heads set on it. Don't tell me," teased Van. Whereupon Joy walked loftily away. Mamma Shipley came to his relief.

"Joy is not to give up her musical hopes, Van," she explained. "I am anxious she shouldn't and I'll appreciate it very much if you will do a little favor for me in this connection."

"You can depend on it, I will," promised the boy, delightedly. For Mamma Shipley to ask a favor of him seemed too good to be true.

"When Joy gets through reading to Mr. Atkinson each day," Mamma went on. "If there's no one in your parlor and if it's quite convenient for you, and you're certain sure your mother won't be disturbed —" she paused with a twinkle for all the world like Joy's.

"Yes'm. She won't and it will and there isn't." Van wiggled, finding it hard to wait.

"Perhaps you'll let her sing for fifteen minutes and you will play for her."

"Now that's something like it." The boy's satisfaction bristled out all over him.

"There are one or two little songs I'm particularly anxious she should do well, and between ourselves, I'm afraid she isn't thinking enough about music these busy days," Mrs. Shipley continued. "So with all those ifs arranged, I'll have her stop each afternoon and sing a bit with you. Then once in a while I'll treat myself to a seat in a dark corner where I can hear how my Joy and my Van get on together. It will make me very happy, dear, if you and she can accomplish the sort of melody I have in my hopes for you both."

There was a lump in Van's throat, though he didn't know why. But since it was there and he couldn't talk comfortably, he just put one arm about Mamma Shipley's shoulders and gave her what Dandy called a bear-hug. And she seemed perfectly satisfied.

No one objected to the new arrangement. Mamma would have been surprised, however, if she'd known that the door of Mr. Atkinson's study stood open that quarter hour each day, and that sometimes Mrs. Kingsbury came and sat on the stairs while the tuneful voice caroled its happiest and Van's fingers added their careful accompaniment.

"I do like it heaps better than elocution,"
Joy confessed one day to her young neighbor.
"But I'm not going to let Mamma know it for worlds till the term's over and I've tried not to waste the money my lessons cost."

"You're a good kid," Van commended her.

"I'm not a kid at all," she answered straightening her shoulders. "I'm a girl who is growing taller every day. But oh, Van—" the dignity melted suddenly. "I am scared stiff every time I think of that class entertainment and my awful Hiawatha."

"Don't do it, then," was Van's advice.

Joy looked down at her hands. "I wouldn't if I didn't have to," she owned in a meek voice.

"Who says you have to?" demanded Van.

"Sh, — don't let a human know. I won't be mean enough to disappoint Miss Cora,

though I think I'll most likely break down. But she'll know I was willing to try."

"Of all the—" Van's voice was wrathful, but Joy interrupted. "You don't understand, Van. It's sort of honor, you know, when Papa's paid for my lessons and Miss Cora depends on me. But after this time, I'll sing. I shouldn't mind that. I could just do my best and not pretend to know more than I do."

For the next few days Van prowled about, looking so fierce that Billy pretended to be afraid of him. He longed to confide his dark secret to Mamma Shipley who sang so cheerily over her work but he wouldn't betray the little confidence.

"It's a wonder she hasn't suspected. Mrs. Shipley always knows everything," he thought as he wrestled with his best tie on the great night. "But she doesn't see through this and she's going to get her feelings hurt if Joy breaks down. Poor little kid."

But Mamma Shipley's feelings weren't hurt. Instead, she slipped over to Van when it was almost time for Joy's turn on the program and she tucked a music roll into Van's hand.

"Miss Cora has decided that Joy had better sing than recite, if you will kindly play for her," she whispered. "Joy feels still a little unprepared on her Hiawatha."

Van grinned broadly as he looked across at Joy, who smiled back with a face that fairly beamed. "If she isn't the very smartest," he said of Mrs. Shipley. "She knew it all the time and that's why she had Joy practise."

When the announcement was made a moment later it was for a solo instead of a recitation. Joy caroled as happily as she'd been doing in the Kingsbury parlor, while Van played as if he had forgotten he was anything but an accompaniment to his friend.

Perhaps it would be too much to say that Joy was Miss Cora's "star" that evening, for Flossy Gaines had learned several new gestures and used them all. But it is probable that the audience enjoyed the little solo as much as they would have enjoyed *Hiawatha's Wooing*, as Joy would have given it. At all events, she had to sing again, and then she

and Van went out and made a bow together. Miss Cora beamed, Miss Jamieson looked a little less cross, and Mamma Shipley held onto Papa's hand as tight as she could squeeze.

"I think you are right, Mrs. Shipley," said Miss Cora afterward. "Music seems to come natural to the child. I do thank you for arranging so she could sing tonight—you saw what pleasure she gave."

"You weren't disappointed in me? Oh, I'm so relieved," sighed Joy.

"No indeed, dear. More than satisfied," her teacher assured her.

"No more elocuting for me," said Joy decidedly on the way home. "If I'd ever remember first off that Mamma knows best, I'd save myself a lot of bother."

"Happy girl if you've learned that lesson," laughed Mr. Kingsbury who was close behind.

"I always know it, sir," Joy told him.
"It's only the remembering that's hard to
do."

"It's the remembering that is hard for us all, little woman," said old Mr. Atkinson.

## THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS

Joy didn't have a chance to wonder what he meant for Van was whispering in her ear, "Your mother's the smartest I ever saw, Joy." "'S if I didn't know that," was Joy's reply.

# CHAPTER XII VAN'S CHANCE

In the year that had passed since the Shipleys planned for Mamma's birthday gift, some changes were to be seen in the family of the Shining Palace. Nobody knew exactly how they had come about, yet all felt them in a half unconscious way. First, there was Grandfather. Of course he'd always loved Van and been proud of him, too, but you wouldn't have suspected it most of the time. It may be that the blue glasses he wore so much hid the twinkle in his eyes, but they left the bushy brows and stern mouth in sight. And Van did try his patience sometimes, which perhaps wasn't strange, since his patience was so very easily tried. But somehow of late things had been different.

When, as sometimes happened, Joy's lessons kept her busy and Van read to his grandfather in her place, he wasn't dismissed with a

### THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS

sharp reproof. Instead, he was really helped over the dry spots and listened to explanations that put a new aspect on the literature Mr. Atkinson loved. You can see for yourself how different that was from the first day Joy read to the old gentleman.

Next, there was Mr. Kingsbury. Of course, after the summer on the farm Father and Van just couldn't go back to being strangers again. There were so many things to remember together and so much to plan for when vacation time should come once more. Van almost shouted for joy every time he thought of one little speech Father had made in the fall. "Van," he had said, "we'll have our family frolic on the farm next time, if your dad has any influence."

"Not Mother? Oh, Daddy—"

"Yes sir-ree. Mother, Grandfather, you and yours truly. And if we can't show them some good times they didn't know there were, then I'm mistaken — that's all. But it's too soon to spring it yet, sonnie. Leave that to me."

So, tucked away in a corner of Van's mind, [160]

# VAN'S CHANCE

was this happy possibility that was taken out and looked at very often, then locked up again, like a miser's treasure chest. This little secret, shared by these two, was one more link in the chain that was binding them together.

Then there was Mother. Her health was surely somewhat better, since her nervous headaches came less often and the noises from the Little Yellow House didn't worry her at all. To prove that they didn't, one might remark that she called Dimple across the side lawn every day that dawned, to listen to her prattle, which was as sweet as birds, so it's no wonder people liked to hear it. Often Dandy was invited too, and there was sure to be a treat of some sort — once a real tea-party with Grandfather Atkinson as invited guest and Mrs. Kingsbury to play "lady-go-to-see" almost as naturally as Mamma did it.

Van? Oh, he was simply made over, and if other people puzzled over the change they might have asked the lad himself. It wouldn't have taken him two minutes to explain the situation. "It's Shipley sunshine." That's what he would have said. "They're always

making it and, as Mrs. Shipley says, when sunshine comes in, darkness has to go out."

Van's attitude toward his mother had changed, too, since that birthday. He hadn't forgotten the children's unselfish planning to spend for their mother money they really needed for themselves. He had resolved then to "be different" and with such an example before him, he could not very well forget. In many little ways he became thoughtful and obliging to the various members of the household. "But it's only what every fellow ought to do — be decent in his own home," he told himself. "What I'd like would be a chance to show 'em I'm in earnest."

It wasn't a question of gifts — Van knew that. For as soon as ever Mother needed anything, she got it. There wasn't a chance to save money to give her pleasure because she had already whatever pleasure money could buy. "I'll have to watch for a chance," the boy decided. "If ever anything does turn up so I can be real downright self-denying, you watch me go for it. I hope it won't be too easy."

# VAN'S CHANCE

At last the chance came, and Van nearly let it slip by, after all. The motor car began it. That same motor car was a big beauty but it went out of the garage so seldom that it seemed foolish to keep a chauffeur. So foolish that at last Mr. Kingsbury told Dick that he might teach Van to run the car, then look for another place.

"You're old enough now to drive it, son, if you won't do anything daring," Father decided. "Genevieve, he's got to come to it, and the sooner the better. You can't keep a growing youth like ours in a bureau drawer. There is no danger for a careful driver and if we should want to do any fancy work now and then, we can easily get a chauffeur for a few hours or days."

Mother looked pale and anxious at the very thought and Van kept his own rapture hidden for fear of hurting her. But it found vent when he visited the Little Yellow House, and it was hard to tell who was most excited, Van or the Shipleys.

That car had been a trial to the lad. Such good-time possibilities as it held, it did seem

a pity that so little enjoyment was gotten out of it, all because Mother was so nervous. Everybody else *knew* it was perfectly safe. Now Father had given not only his permission but his command, and maybe the Shipleys wouldn't get paid back for some of the good times he'd enjoyed with Dick and Dolly!

"It won't take me long to learn it like a book," gloated Van as the boy Shipleys stood at respectful attention. "Dick has been showing me about it already, every chance he's had, and I'll be ready to take you out in no time, Mrs. Shipley."

"That will be so fine I simply shan't be able to recognize myself," declared Mamma. "I shall don my best bib and tucker for that occasion, Van, dear."

The boy glowed. Not one word about being afraid to trust him — not a doubt as to his ability. "She knows I wouldn't undertake it till I knew how," mused Van. "I wish Mother —" but he stopped that thought before it went any farther. The next weeks were busy ones. School and studies — music and motor cars — it seemed to Van that there

# VAN'S CHANCE

wasn't any playtime left. But after all it didn't matter since the good times coming would make up for all the waiting.

At last the day was set. Grandfather had to be counted out because he never would ride — not even with Dick. But Mother had been coaxed to join the party and every Shipley, except Papa, who was too busy, was going out in the big touring car. Where? Why to the farm, of course. There surely wasn't any other place in the world so fitting as the climax for a frolic as that same farm. And Van was to drive every step of the way — Dick wasn't even going.

It seemed as if he couldn't wait — as if Monday and Tuesday were at least two weeks ahead of Saturday, and even Wednesday and Thursday several days away. But it did come at last and it was hard to tell who was most excited, Van or his neighbors. Mamma had a basket of dinner because it wouldn't be fair for a whole carload of hungry travelers to descend on Mrs. Evans for entertainment. But she'd cooked things on Friday so as to be ready early, and by nine o'clock in the

morning the Little Yellow House was tidy as a new pin from top to bottom and the inmates were hustling into clean clothes. Joy had on her best, cherished hair-ribbons, Dimple looked like a plump fairy, and Mamma wore her very best silk waist as if it was Sunday instead of Saturday.

Van had already been back and forth half a dozen times. Joy could see the shining car drawn out for a last dusting.

"Oh, glory day," she giggled. "I've been dreaming about this ride for a hundred years, it seems to me, and now the time's come."

"It sure has — and there'll be lots more like it," Van assured her as he swelled with pride and happiness.

Just then Godfrey rapped. He'd unbent his former dignity enough to come through the hedge gate and onto the back porch, and when he caught sight of Dimple he couldn't hide the twinkle in his eye, try as he would. "Master Van, Mrs. Kingsbury wants you, soon h'as possible."

"Nothing wrong, I hope, Godfrey," said Mrs. Shipley pleasantly. The man hesitated.

# VAN'S CHANCE

- "She didn't say, 'm," he answered.
- "Of course not. I hope you are well, Godfrey."
- "Hi may say as I'm reasonable, 'm. Thank you kindly, 'm."
- "Run along, Van, dear, and don't keep Mother waiting. We are ready any time, but remember there's not the least bit of hurry," and Mamma patted her young visitor on the shoulder. "Joy bring me the work basket and I'll sew on those buttons while I—rest."

And then Van's struggle came. His mother was shaking with a nervous chill when he got to her room and her trembling hands reached for his firm, brown fingers. "Son, I've tried my best to steel myself to the ordeal, but I cannot do it," she almost wailed. "I am so deadly afraid, it would make me ill, I know."

The boy held her hands and tried to speak very patiently.

"I'm no end sorry, Mother. I hoped you'd enjoy the ride, but if you feel like this about it you'd better stay home, of course. We won't be gone late."

"Oh, but, Van, it isn't only I—it's all the rest. I shall not have a moment's peace while you are away. Son, you'll have to let Dick drive. I can't see you start off alone when I am so sure an accident will follow."

For one hot instant Van felt like wrenching loose from the clinging fingers and running away with his car and his friends. For that hot instant, anger surged through and through him as a vision of happy Mamma Shipley came up in contrast to his weak and nervous mother. But with the thought of Mamma Shipley came the remembrance of his resolve—here was the chance he'd been waiting for. Could he do it? Oh, could he? He hadn't expected it to be like this—he'd counted so on this day's pleasure. And his friends—

He laid his cool fingers on the throbbing temples against the cushions. "There, Mother, don't fret," he said soothingly. Then there was a long, long pause while he stroked the burning forehead. A pause, while he breathed deep and set his jaws firm and square. This was his "chance." Well, it

### VAN'S CHANCE

wasn't "too easy." But then, — then he said slowly — oh, very slowly but quite steadily, "I'll send Dick with the folks to the farm today and I'll stay and take care of you."

"Oh, my boy, how I do thank you," she sobbed, reaching up for his hands and kissing them.

"I—I'm glad to do it for you. I'll go explain to Mrs. Shipley, then I'll be back. Don't fret, Mother."

He was very pale when he entered the Little Yellow House but his voice had a new ring as if Van had suddenly grown up. "Mother has one of her headaches — yes, it came suddenly, and she can't go. Mrs. Shipley, I — I hate it no end, but I think I ought to — I think I'd better stay with her. Dick will take you to the farm — give my love to Mrs. Evans."

"Why, Van Kingsbury! —" the chorus got that far, then stopped at Mamma's raised hand. "That will do, boysies. You are perfectly excusable, Van, dear, and we'll have a lovely ride with Dick. Next time you can take us yourself—just a few squares till Mother gets used to the thought. You see, Van, it takes us mothers a little while to realize that our babies get to be men so soon."

Van turned his cap in his hands and looked down. If there should happen to be any moisture in his eyes he wouldn't have Joy see it for worlds. But Joy was too much like her mother to add to his embarrassment so she only said, "I'd do exactly what you're doing, Van. If my mother was sick all the automobiles between here and Texas wouldn't get me away from her."

"Thank you, Joy, and all of you. Goodbye."

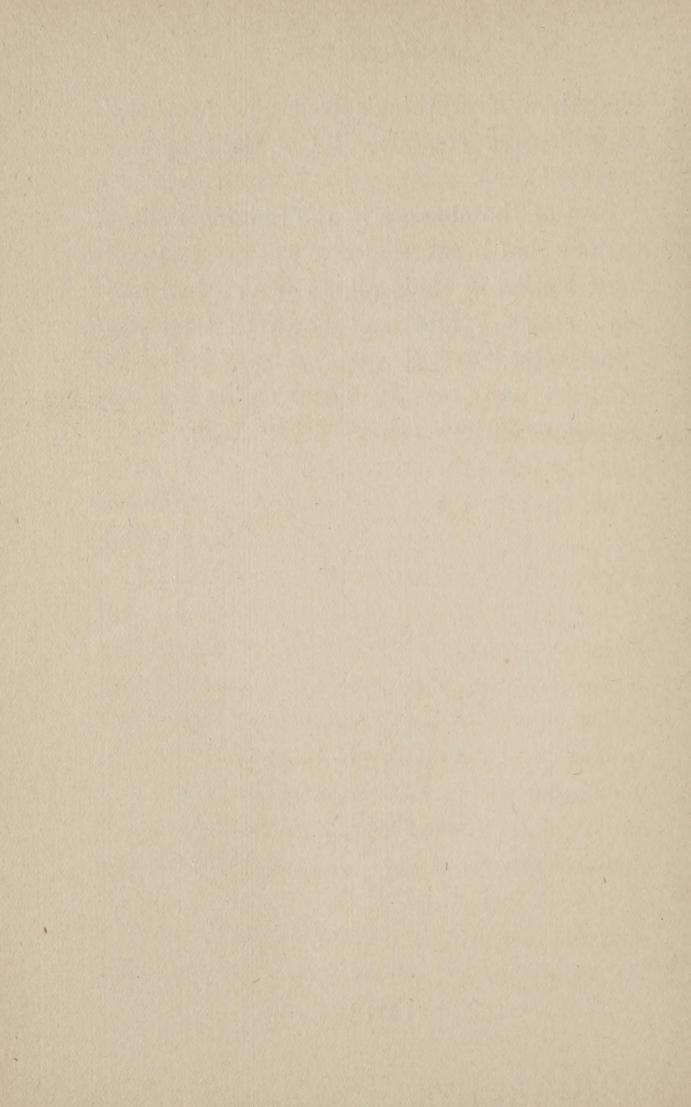
"Good-bye, Van," the chorus united cheerily and Mamma didn't stop them this time. She went with Van to the door, clear out of sight of every Shipley and she put her arms about him and kissed him as if he had been Bensie. "You are a dear lad and I love you." That was all she said, but Van knew she understood.

Five minutes later he pressed an aching head against his shoulder and stroked it

## VAN'S CHANCE

tenderly. "Everything's fixed, now, Mother," he whispered steadily. "I'm right here—to stay."

And of the changes in the Shining Palace, the one that began that day was greatest and most lasting of them all. For Van had had his "chance" and had shown that he was "in earnest."



## CHAPTER XIII

### DIMPLE AND DANDY

"'Then the free little mithes flew back up in the barn'," sang Dimple.

"It's the three little owls that flew," Dandy corrected her. "Mice can't fly."

"Mine can." The little girl cuddled her doll and rocked to and fro.

"'And they that clothe togedder and they felt tho nithe and warm,

Go to thleep, my Luthy May."

"Now that's not right, either." Dandy looked disgusted. "Seems like you'd try to get things the way they ought to go."

"She'll learn, sonny-boy," called Mamma from the kitchen. "She gets along pretty well for her age."

"I don't think ages ought to make any difference," Dandy declared stoutly. "We ought to do things right, anyway, and if anybody tells us how we ought to be glad."

"Very good logic, sonny-boy. Try to [173]

#### THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS

make personal application of it," Mamma went on.

Dandy considered. "Do you mean do that way myself? Why, of course, I'm going to. I've already made up my mind."

Dimple sang on:

"'And the thong that they thang I will now thing you,
It beginth and it endth with the wordth "Tu Whoo,"
And a very, very pretty little thong it ith too,
Go to thleep, my Luthy May.'"

If ever there was a sunny-haired, blue-eyed cherub who took hearts by storm, Dimple was that one. Her real name everybody but Mamma had practically forgotten, since the dimples in cheeks and chin made that one so appropriate. She sang sweetly and easily, learning all the little songs that came her way with surprising quickness. If, as sometimes happened, memory failed, she supplied her own words without difficulty. It was this trait that Dandy didn't approve of and he labored to correct it on every occasion. But for all Dimple's softness and her bewitching ways, she had a will of her own and when Dandy talked of things she

didn't enjoy she would change the subject most adroitly. So when her brother found fault with her mice, which she insisted upon supplying with wings, she only finished the verse before she said, "Luthy May's athleep, Dandy. I'll put her down and you can come to my tea-party."

"What you got?" Dandy wasn't to be drawn into society unless it was worth while. "Appleth and crackerth and lumpth of sugar," the hostess told him, as she tucked Lucy May into bed. Dimple seldom failed in her care of this best loved dolly, made for her by a precious, far-away auntie whose name it bore. It had been "Moothy" to its little mother till lately and the changed pronunciation showed that Dimple was, as Mamma said, growing up.

"All right. Get your spread ready. I'll stay if you're not too long," and Dandy sat down to await the arranging of the banquet.

The bits of dishes were carefully handled. In some respects at least, the little girl was trying to "get things the way they ought to go."

"You're too fussy, Dimp," the waiting guest complained. "Give me my share and let me go."

"No, Dandy," Mamma interfered. "You were invited to a tea-party and you must either accept or decline the invitation. Polite people don't dictate the way their refreshments should be served."

"Well, girls are fussy anyway and I'm in a hurry. The Bees began the new post holes and I promised I'd dig after school."

"The post holes are not suffering for attention. Sit down and be a gentleman." Then Mamma added slyly, "Because we ought to do things right and if anybody tells us how we ought to be glad."

Dandy flushed, then grinned, and grumbled no more. But when you have to eat refreshments that are cut to fit very tiny cups and plates, you don't get along quite as fast as at a full-grown meal. After it was over he took his cap with a little sigh of relief and went out to the back lot where a new fence was to be built. There was a hole more than half dug and the lad drew off the brush that had

#### DIMPLE AND DANDY

been laid across it and began to deepen it. The soil was sandy and the spade light so he dug for a few minutes in much glee. It seemed as if he could almost feel himself grow taller as he worked at such a manly employment. He whistled and watched the little mound of earth grow larger.

"I must keep it square as I can," he remembered. "Because the posts are square. I'll lift one in when the hole's deep enough because Papa said open post holes are dangerous. He had a horse once that broke its leg in a post hole and it had to be shot. Some folks are awful careless about things."

Just then Van whistled and Dandy dropped his spade. "He don't know the Bees are all gone to Gym. I'll have to tell him," and away the digger sped. As it happened, however, it wasn't the Bees Van wanted but Dandy himself. He was going out for a spin in the joy wagon, as he called the big car, and Dandy was to accompany him. Breathless with importance, Dandy needed no second invitation, and two minutes later he and the young chauffeur puffed out of the garage and

away. It was the first time Dandy had ever been invited out alone with Van, and his enjoyment knew no bounds. Van explained everything in sight till his passenger felt perfectly sure he could run the car alone.

Van was growing very much at his ease with the wheel and, having gone around the few squares as first intended, he turned down Schuyler Street toward the business part of the city whose lines of light had glimmered back at Joy that long-ago night when the Shipleys were strangers in the Little Yellow House.

Down town, something happened to detain the travelers awhile and it was not till all the lights were glimmering again that Van drove up with a blast of his horn to the gate, whose woodbine frame had been trimmed away for the winter. But no one shouted back at what Dimple called the "honkhonk" and for once the Little Yellow House failed to spill boys from every door at such a challenge.

"Must be terribly busy," Van grumbled, disappointed at the silence. "No, I can't

#### DIMPLE AND DANDY

come in, Dandy. Got to take the joy wagon home. Don't mention it. Fare you well, kid."

And then Dandy remembered for the first time that he had done what no junior Shipley was ever supposed to do. He'd gone away out of sight and sound without asking permission or telling where he was going. A queer, uneasy feeling clutched him as he said shamefacedly, "Oh, gee, I didn't mean to forget."

Dimple, left alone after her guest's departure, finished the last drop of "cambric tea," then washed her dishes and put them away, stopping to arrange them as nearly like Mamma's as she could make them look. "Plateth in dis corner," she murmured. "Cupth and thauthers next. The teapot hath to thit over here and the cream pitcher can go in by thide it." Mamma smiled at the dear little face as the gold curls bobbed up and down in her earnestness and the rosebud lips drew into a thoughtful pucker. "She's beginning to study how things should be," Mamma said to herself. "I'll lose my

baby before I know it." She sighed just a wee scrap of a sigh, then said cheerily, "I think Lucy May has waked up, little mother. Suppose you take her out in the fresh air awhile. I'm sure it would do her good."

"All right. I think tho too, Mrs. Shipley," and Dimple giggled.

"Let me help you on with your wraps, Mrs. Green." Mamma did play lady-go-to-see too lovely. "Call very soon again, and be sure to bring Lucy May. She does behave so beautifully."

"Fankth. She ith going to have thearlet fever next week but when she getth well I'll bring her. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Green. I suppose you wouldn't care to kiss me? Ladies do sometimes, you know, when they are very good friends."

"I want to kith you and Luthy May doth too."

"My little boy, Dandy, is down in the back-lot, Mrs. Green. I think he would be very glad to see you. Suppose you call on him while you are out."

#### DIMPLE AND DANDY

Mrs. Shipley opened the door and let Dimple out, then watched her down to the back-lot gate which Dandy had left ajar. "There isn't a thing to hurt her there and Dandy always takes good care of her," she thought as she waved her hand. "She will get a good dose of oxygen this fine, bracing day," and back she went to her sewing as hard as she could go. The Little Yellow House seemed empty with all its little people gone. Joy was at Miss Cora's to tea, by special invitation, the Bees were at the gymnasium where they dearly loved to go and Mamma drew a contented breath as she thought of them. "All well and happy. All near enough to come trooping home, hungry and hearty, pretty soon. And thank the dear Lord, there's food in plenty to satisfy them. Heavenly Father, help me to be as good as I ought to be with all my blessings."

The machine traveled merrily down the seams in Joy's new Sunday dress. In the kitchen the kettle sang, then bubbled and finally boiled over. "A signal for me to

begin supper," thought Mamma. "Why how cold it has turned! I must call the children in."

But there was no answer and Mamma ran down to the back-lot gate and called again. The short daylight was waning — where were the children? Through the hedge she slipped — no, Godfrey had not seen them. The family was out, so the little ones could not be upstairs.

Down the street came Papa and the Bees chattering merrily. "Back-lot, honey? Oh, they're there, of course," said Papa easily when he heard about it. "Our children never run away, you know." By that time the whole tribe was sprinting across the yard, calling as they flew, Mamma close behind. "Dandy went out to dig post holes," she began.

"Post holes!" That was all Papa said but he outdistanced his boys.

Oh, yes, they found her with only a sprained ankle to tell of her fall. She had slipped on the soft mound of dirt that Dandy left and had gone, all in a heap, down the hole the

sharp spade had dug. Dimple was not delicate, and slippery as the foothold was she might have pulled herself out if it hadn't been for the poor little ankle. That couldn't help a bit, but it ached and burned till its owner, worn out with calling and sobbing, settling tighter and tighter into the hole, which was a snug fit at best, fell sound asleep at last, her head pillowed on Lucy May's breast. It was a well padded breast and a fairly comfortable pillow, and Dimple was still sleeping when they found her and Papa lifted her, so very tenderly, out of her muddy plight.

"I cried ath loud ath I could and anybody didn't come," she explained. "And my foot hurth awful, Mamma." The blue eyes overflowed again.

"Hurts — I should think it did. It's black and blue already. Arnica, Bensie, quick, and hot water. Mother's baby girl!"

"Don't worry, honey, it isn't serious," Papa reminded her.

"I know, but it's painful. Dandy ought to have — Henry, where is Dandy?"

Just then the "honk-honk" blew. But Bensie was upstairs, rummaging for arnica, Billy was bringing hot water and Bert was piling cushions on the old couch. Not one of them cared for all the motor cars that ever tooted while Dimple looked so white and ill.

So that was what Dandy found when he came around the house and opened the kitchen door. "Had a great old ride with Van. What's the matter with Dimp?"

"Come here, Daniel, and] explain this." When had Papa Shipley ever said "Daniel" before?

"I don't know about it, Pops. Is Dimple sick?"

"She went out to meet her brother who, it seems, had gone away without permission, and she fell in the post hole he had left open."

Dandy sat suddenly down. "Dimp fell in my post hole?" he gasped. "Papa did she — did she break her leg like your horse and will — will she—" The boy could go no further. Papa Shipley said afterward that the culprit got his punishment that

#### DIMPLE AND DANDY

moment. But there had to be some warning given — Dandy must not forget again.

"No, Daniel, her leg is not broken but it is painfully hurt and she won't be able to walk for a few days, probably."

"And it was my fault. I oughtn't to leave holes that way," sobbed Dandy.

"Yes, son, your fault. If she had slipped in head down — if she had, Dandy, there wouldn't have been any Dimple for us, any more. And she might have done so." Papa's own voice shook and Dandy threw himself into his father's arms. "I didn't mind — I never asked to go and I nearly killed her. Oh, Papa, what can such a wicked boy do?"

"Make up his mind he will not forget again. You did wrong, son, and it is right you should suffer because you have given suffering. So while sister is laid up, you must spend your playtime amusing her and keeping her contented."

"I will—you just watch me. But first of all, Pops, I'm going to put a post in that hole."

"Don't fall in yourself. There's been [185]

enough damage done already," growled Ben. "It's dark as Egypt out there."

"I don't care if it's black as Inky's fur. The scareder I am, the harder I'll remember," and Dandy set valiantly forth.

"Don't reproach him, boys. He's had enough for this time," Mamma told them as the door shut behind their little brother. "Bensie, set the table, and you other lads can wash your hands and cut the bread and cheese."

It was bedtime when Dandy came for his good-night kiss and said humbly, "I scolded Dimp because she didn't do things right and I said I was going to. And, Mamma, the very first chance I had, I did things wrong myself. I don't think I'm very dependent, do you?"

"Dependable, you mean. No, dear, not very, but I hope you will be more so after this."

"I'll never, never — " Dandy began vehemently, then stopped and shook his head. "I'd better not say it — I'd better do it," he remarked quietly. And Mamma thought so too.

## CHAPTER XIV

## THE EDUCATION FUND

During their residence at the Little Yellow House the pigeons had done all that could reasonably have been expected of them. Even Bensie, their ambitious manager, would have owned that. "But not all I want them to do," he reflected as he stood looking through the wire into the flying pen. "They're pretty things and that's no joke," and he stopped to admire an iridescent fellow, preening himself in the sunshine as if he knew he was a beauty. "And they behave so well," Ben went on. "No fighting or getting sick and dying just when you think you've got a good start. I'll take 'em any time, rather than chickens."

Then Bensie turned away and sitting down on the chopping block began to meditate. It wasn't often that a junior Shipley meditated in secret — there were usually several

#### THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS

assistants — and Bensie soon realized that something was lacking. He whistled and Dandy came to the gate. "Send Bert and Billy here," called Bensie. "Tell 'em I want 'em straight off — it's important."

The desired young gentlemen came promptly, with Dandy to hear what it was all about. "Sit down, kids," commanded the moderator of the meeting. "Now, listen, and no foolishness."

The boys immediately chose seats on the nearby woodpile. Their solemn faces showed that they realized this was no time for levity.

- "It's up to us to begin doing something," Ben told them, impressively.
- "What are we going to do?" asked Dandy, the uninvited.
- "Us three Bees, I mean, Dandy. You're too young yet, but you'll be in it after a while," Ben told him.
  - "Fire away," invited Billy.
- "It's this way, fellows. We're getting bigger and costing more all the time and Pops is going to have his hands full, time he gets us and Joy and the youngsters educated."

"That's so," assented Bert, but Billy shook his head.

"He needn't bother about me. I know enough now to go to work and earn money."

Ben wheeled on him. "No, you don't," he declared. "You don't know much of anything. None of us do, yet, but Mamma wants us all educated and we are going to be. Yes, we are, if I have to catch you and hold your nose while Bert pours it down your throat."

"That's not education — that's castor oil," remarked Dandy, who had had experience.

Bensie paid no attention. "I'm in earnest, fellows," he went on. "It's not fair for three husky lads like us to look to our father for everything we need and we'll cost him more every year. We've got to do something, I tell you."

"Well, why don't you fire away and show us what?" demanded Bert. "We're willing if there's any daylight left after we do our studies and the chores. We don't waste much time, Bee Shipley."

"Pigeons is the answer," said Ben im[189]

pressively. "Yes, I know we've got 'em and we haven't made much money off 'em, but that's no sign we can't. Look here." Ben drew out a dingy notebook and a scrap of pencil so dull that Billy's knife had to be borrowed before it would make a mark. "We bought ten pairs of homers. In one year we've had seventy-five pairs of squabs and the cost of food for the outfit was not more than twelve dollars. We've sold the squabs for seventy cents a pair and that leaves us a profit of forty dollars and fifty cents. Out of that we've paid for pigeon house and nest-boxes and things, so it's taken it all only what we spent for Mamma's chair and a few little stunts like that."

Bert yawned. "Get rich quick that way, I don't think," he declared.

"I've got some more to say. We have room now, since the addition's built, for fifty pigeons just as easy as twenty. They'll average pretty close to sixteen squabs a year for every pair and say a dollar a year to feed each family. There's twenty-five dollars for

grain. Now four hundred pairs of squabs at seventy cents would make two hundred and eighty dollars a year. Call it two hundred and fifty so as to allow for accidents, take off the twenty-five for grain and see what you've got left. We could save the two hundred and use the twenty-five for improvements on our plant."

"Our plant? I thought you were talking about pigeons." Dandy couldn't be squelched.

"So I am. A plant's any sort of business you can make money out of. This pigeon outfit is our plant."

"Yes, we plant the money and what comes up? Maybe something, maybe nothing." Billy was inclined to be sceptical but Bert was at once convinced. "It's not as if we hadn't tried it, Bill," he reminded his brother. "Ben's got it down in black and white and you can't go back on that."

"Well, where'll we get the cash for fifteen more pairs? There's fifteen dollars at one clip."

"We don't have to get 'em at one clip,"
[ 191 ]

Bensie told him calmly. "There'll be six pairs of squabs ready to go to the Palace Hotel on Saturday and three pairs next week. We can buy the old ones, five pairs at a time and before we know it we'll have our pen full, our income assured and our fund begun."

"Where'll we sell so many?" asked Billy.

"What fund?" enquired Bert in the same breath. Bensie twinkled. His brothers were beginning to be interested as he'd hoped.

"Sell 'em to the hotels, easy as wink," he answered one question at a time. "The Palace growls every time I go because I can't supply them faster and the Empire uses a lot. No danger about selling them."

"Get up a sort of rival — er — rivalry and sell our squabs to the highest bidder," advised Billy.

"That might come later," Bensie nodded wisely. "The fund, Bert, is our Education Fund that's going plump into the savings bank, and keep on growing, sir, till Dimple and Dandy, Joy and us three are polished off to the top notch." Bensie threw his cap

skyward with a whoop that brought Van to the spot in short order.

"What are you fellows up to?" he asked curiously. "Might let a pal in on your schemes, seems to me."

"This isn't play, it's solemn earnest, Van," Ben assured him. "We've been planning our College course and the way to get it. Just pigeons, old man. We're going to increase our flock and try to save some cold coin. How's Latin today?"

"Tiresome as ever. I'd give my head if I could pitch in with you fellows at the old Pub. Nothing doing at the Latin Prep only stupid stunts and droning drags."

"Whoopee, he's some grouchy this time," said Billy, whistling, while Bert added, "Don't dispose of your head, Van. You may not need it at your Latin Prep, but we use 'em at the old Pub, believe me."

The boys did not go back to their former subject then, but Ben tucked away notebook and pencil and made one or two mental notes before he dismissed the subject.

When supper was over and the table cleared,

he brought them out and spread facts and figures before Papa and Mamma Shipley.

"It looks perfectly plausible, son," was Papa's comment after careful consideration. "I see no reason why the thing can't be carried through successfully and I'll promise to keep the plant in shape. That's somewhat in my line, you know, sir," and Papa laughed.

"That's no end good of you, Pops, but you must let the pigeons pay their own expenses. If you could put in a little time, now and then, we'll be ever so much obliged, but lumber, you know, or wire and nails, you must buy out of the fund. That's only fair."

"It's the finest thing I've heard for a long time." Mamma fairly beamed. "I've been racking my brain to think of some way for us to save a school nest-egg. I couldn't think of a thing but selling the farm and we'd hate to do that unless it was necessary. But the children have to be educated, you know that, Henry."

"Yes, honey, I do." Papa said it but nobody heard him on account of the din that Mamma's reference to the farm raised.

#### THE EDUCATION FUND

She laughingly raised her voice above the rest to beg for silence. "We haven't any intention of doing it now," she assured them. "But Bensie's to be our preacher, we hope, and it costs money to make preachers. And Billy's our doctor and Bert our lawyer and Dandy—"

"You might leave me one. I may need a partner, later on," Papa reminded her, teasingly. "Though perhaps your ambitions, madam—" he didn't get any farther, for Mamma was almost choking him with both arms around his neck. "If any or all six of our children are one half as noble and dear as their father I couldn't have any higher ambitions for them," she told him.

"Then we'll call it square, honey." Papa was laughing as he kissed her. Nobody needed to be told whom he wanted his daughters to copy. Mamma went back to her sewing.

"Go on, mommie, what are we girls to be?" begged Joy.

"You a musician and Dimple an artist," Mamma obligingly prophesied. "Of course [195]

that's only for a few years. I want you to have good husbands and six children apiece and a home as happy and dear as the Little Yellow House. Then I'll be perfectly satisfied for my girls."

"Deary me, I'd much rather be a prima donna like Van wants me to be," said Joy. "I don't intend to marry until I'm too old to sing any more because prima donnas travel all over the world and have a perfectly fascinating time. I'll have Van along to keep me from getting homesick. He's to play better than Paderewski or Liszt."

"Modest ambitions, these," laughed Mamma. "Oh, well, you'll never reach higher than your aspirations, children, so set your goal away up toward the mountain peaks. But Henry—" with a sudden change of tone—"the thing that pleases me most of all about this plan is that Bensie thought it out. You were casting about for possibilities, I was scouring my intellect for ideas, and Bensie—"

"Bensie beat you to it. Hurrah for Ben and the Education Fund!" Billy had kept still as long as he could. Papa pushed back his chair and stood up as if he needed more room. When Mr. Shipley stood straight up his head didn't quite touch the ceilings of the Little Yellow House but it really didn't lack so very much of it. His two big, kind hands could reach up and touch it easily, and he always had to go out doors to swing Dimple up in the air or she'd have gotten a bump to remember. Now he folded his hands behind him and began to pace back and forth.

"I didn't mean to say a word till it was settled," he began, "but since confidences and plans seem to be the order of the evening, I'll add mine."

Mamma's sewing slipped to her lap. "I knew there was something on your mind, Henry," she said a little anxiously.

"It's the new City Hall. I've put in my bid and if I get the contract to build it, I'll be able to start the Education Fund myself. But of course I may not get it. In fact—" he paused as if he hated to finish, then went on as if he thought he ought to—" in fact, I don't suppose I shall, honey, because

there's more or less political influence needed in these municipal jobs, and I haven't a bit of that, you know."

"Well, I'm glad you haven't." Mamma was sewing again, but her fingers shook a little. "If your work doesn't speak for itself, let their bosses and ring-leaders run things as they will, and suffer the consequences."

Papa smiled tenderly. "The consequences won't make them suffer, honey. There are other men who can build the City Hall as well as I, but I'd like very much to be the one to do it, and swell our fund, Bensie, lad."

"I sort of feel like you will, Papa," declared Joy. "I choose Bryn Mawr for mine.

Miss Cora says that's one of the best."

The boys shouted but Mamma shook her head at them. "It's not too soon for any of us to be finding out which is best," she said. "And no doubt Miss Cora knows a great deal about it. I'll talk it over with her, next time she comes."

"That will be tomorrow if it's convenient for you. She said so," Joy announced.

#### THE EDUCATION FUND

The new pigeons came within the next few days. Papa insisted on buying the fifteen pairs at once, saying that the boys could pay him for them as they sold the squabs. The pets took kindly to their new quarters and companions and if attention could have turned their pretty heads, they would have been spoiled past remedy. As it was, they went serenely to work, building nests from the box of clean straw Bensie kept in reach, and preparing a reception for the squabs when they should arrive. The Palace Hotel contracted for all Ben could furnish and visions of a much larger "plant" began to take shape in the lad's brain. But for the present, hands and time were full, and only Van knew of larger hopes for the future.

"It's no end more interesting when you don't have much money," that youth complained to his father. "The whole Shipley family is waiting to see if Mr. Shipley gets the City Hall and it's more fun than moving pictures, the plans they make. They want him to get it, worst way, but he says it's doubtful. So they talk about it as if it

would be Fourth of July or Thanksgiving or something like that, if he comes home and says he got it."

"Shipley bidding on the City Hall?" asked Mr. Kingsbury.

"Yes, he's going to start their Education Fund if he gets it." Dandy had been telling details no one expected repeated, it seemed. But then, the Shipleys hadn't many secrets from their friends, after all. "No skeleton in our closet, thank the dear Lord," Mamma used to say sometimes.

"M-hm." That was every word Mr. Kingsbury said about it, and that can't really be called a word.

It was Saturday night. Ben had fed and watered the flock, had gathered a cap full of eggs from the hen house, had patted Dick's nose and rubbed Dolly's flank; then, followed by Yankee Doodle, stepped on the back porch just as Papa came around the house.

"Go in, son. Get them all together. I have something to tell you." Bensie thought of the City Hall, first thing, but he couldn't

guess from Papa's quiet voice whether it was going to be good news or bad.

Papa looked down on the group that gathered about him and held out his arms as if he wanted to hug them all at once. "Thank God for His goodness to us. I got the contract," he announced.

An hour later Van strolled in to where his father was sitting at his desk. "Mr. Shipley got the job he wanted, Dad," he announced, sitting on the arm of the desk chair as he wouldn't have thought of sitting before last summer. "They're as happy as if they had a ready-made fortune given them."

Mr. Kingsbury nodded approvingly. "I'm glad of it. Shipley's a good man—he'll do the square thing by the City."

But neither Van nor Mr. Shipley knew that the "influence" needed had been furnished by Mr. Kingsbury. "No use burdening him with any obligations," that gentleman told himself. "I owe Shipley a good deal, yet." But no one would have been any more mystified to hear that speech than Mr. Shipley himself.

### CHAPTER XV

# A TESTED FRIENDSHIP

There come times even to Shining Palaces when it seems as if everything goes wrong at once. In January such a time came to the Kingsbury's. First, Grandfather got sick. That was a most surprising thing for Mr. Atkinson to do, because he wasn't in the habit of it at all. Aside from his eye weakness that made the blue glasses necessary, he seemed as strong and rugged as an oak tree and nobody ever expected him to get bronchitis, like ordinary people. If he ever did catch a little cold, it put him very much out of humor ordinary people would be called cross if they'd act as Grandfather did. But with this attack he was so gentle and patient he made you wish he would scold a little.

Mrs. Kingsbury was very much worried and finally almost got down sick herself. Then Dr. James took matters into his own hands and shipped them both, with Marie and a trained nurse, to Atlantic City, winter though it was. "The salt air will do you both good and the sooner you get to it, the better," he said and the start was very soon indeed.

"I hate to leave you, Van," Mother said as she kissed him good-bye. "If it wasn't for school you should go, too."

"I'm all right — I don't need salt air," replied Van cheerfully. "Dad and I'll get along humming, and don't you worry."

"If anything goes wrong, Mrs. Kingsbury, I'll take him under my wing," promised Mamma Shipley, who had come in to say good-bye. Her neighbor turned to her gratefully, saying, "I know you will. You are a great comfort, Mrs. Shipley."

Van drove them to the station all by himself and guided the car so skillfully that Mother didn't say "Be careful" more than a dozen times.

If the house seemed a bit lonesome after he got back, it was only for a few minutes. Just till he could put away his "motor togs" and get through the hedge gate to the Little

#### A TESTED FRIENDSHIP

Yellow House, where he stayed till time for Father to come home. They had a cosy evening, playing checkers, planning for next summer and finishing up with what Van called a "dandy lemonade." "Lonesome? Not on your life — not with Dad," Van told Bensie next day. "Of course we miss the folks and we're all around sorry they're sick, but — oh, you know, Ben, men do have a good time together when there's nobody else around."

It did seem too bad that the next day a telegram came calling Mr. Kingsbury to New York at once. "If it wasn't important I wouldn't leave you, kid," Father told Van regretfully. "We were just getting ready to do justice to the occasion and here this business comes along and upsets us. Never mind, boy, I'll be back in a week and you'll see if there isn't some fun left in this part of the globe."

"It's all right, Dad." Van tried to speak cheerfully. "There are the Shipleys, you know."

"Yes, I do know and I'm glad they're [205]

there. Guess you'd miss those same Shipleys if they'd take a notion to go back to the farm, to stay."

"They'd better not suggest such a thing to me." Van was as fierce as if all such decisions lay with him.

"They are not likely to," Father comforted him. "Mr. Shipley's prospects are good in a business way, he tells me, and our schools are the great attraction. I must go—it won't do to miss my train. So long, old man—don't get lonesome."

Van looked out the window after his father. There was some studying to be done before supper time, so the Little Yellow House couldn't be his refuge in this new loneliness. There was a lump in his throat and his head ached — though he hadn't thought of it till that minute.

The skies were turning gray and the wind was rising. There wasn't a sound in the Shining Palace. Godfrey never made any noise and Ann's clatter was shut away into the kitchen. The lad turned to his books with a little shiver. The fire must be getting

#### A TESTED FRIENDSHIP

low — how cold it was. Queer thrills began running up his back with hot flashes between. He never did feel like this, no matter how low the temperature dropped. And oh, how his head ached!

Now didn't it seem queer for a fellow to go and get sick the minute he was all alone? You couldn't call Mrs. Shipley over for a little cold — not as busy as she was. The couch looked pretty comfortable — no, on the whole he liked his own room better. He might as well lie down till his head stopped aching because nobody could study with a sledge-hammer for a brain.

The Shipleys had just finished supper when Godfrey knocked. "It's Master Van, 'm," he explained apologetically. "Hif I might make so bold, 'e wouldn't come down to 'is dinner, 'm, though Ann 'ad fixed it particular for 'im by way of 'is being alone, 'm. I went to 'is door but 'e wouldn't open it, 'aving a bad 'eadache. Hf 'e could be looked after, 'm, askin' your pardon—"

Mamma Shipley reached for her shawl. "I'll go right over, Godfrey. Why didn't [207]

you come before? Joy, dear, you put the children to bed and I'll stay till nine o'clock or so. Henry, if the laddie should be really ill I may spend the night there, so don't worry if I don't come back till time to get breakfast. Good-night, chickabiddies. Everybody be good." And Mamma Shipley slipped out into the darkness, little dreaming of all that *might* happen before she came back to her family again.

Van was a sick boy. As soon as Mrs. Shipley touched his dry, burning skin she knew that. He hardly noticed her entrance and soon began talking in a rambling way that didn't sound like Van. Mrs. Shipley looked him over carefully, then said to herself, "I shall 'phone for the doctor. It is better to be on the safe side this pneumonia weather."

Dr. James traveled fast and in a short time was in Van's room.

He looked grave as he examined the sick boy. "It is probably a heavy cold he has taken, Mrs. Shipley. Morning may throw more light on the subject. An illness cannot

#### A TESTED FRIENDSHIP

always be diagnosed from its initial stage of chill and fever — so many ailments may begin that way. Shall I send a nurse?"

"Not if you think I will do for the present. He may be much better by morning and I'll stay tonight. His mother would like me to, I am sure."

"He could hardly be in better hands." The doctor bowed. "Keep the drops going and I'll be in early tomorrow. If you need me before then, 'phone me. Good-night."

All night the sick lad moaned and tossed while the watcher sat by and ministered to him. At dawn she turned back the covers to straighten them out and on the smooth skin of chest and arms she saw a sight that startled her. She hurried to the 'phone.

"Dr. James, this is Mrs. Shipley. Van has had a bad night and this morning shows an eruption that is very peculiar in appearance. I wish you would come at once." He did not even wait to answer, but she knew by the click of his receiver that he would lose no time.

"I don't like it," he said sharply a few [209]

minutes later, while Van slept heavily on. "Of course you know, madam, that there are several cases of smallpox in town. I don't say Van has it, but I consider the symptoms most suspicious."

- "I was afraid of it as soon as I saw these—these queer spots." Mamma Shipley was pale, but her voice was steady and the doctor looked at her curiously.
- "Do you realize what this entails, madam, if our fears are realized?" he asked her.
- "Quarantine, you mean, for me as well as Van? Yes, I thought it all out while I waited for you, Dr. James. I can't go home to my family so I'll just stay with Van. He'd rather have me than a stranger and you can tell me what to do for him."
- "Has any one else been exposed here?" was the next question.
- "I think not. Godfrey has been to the door but he didn't come in the room and he hasn't touched Van."
  - "And yourself?"
- "I have taken every risk, ignorantly but no less truly. I'll stay."

- " And if —"
- "If I take it though I don't think I will I'll have my plans made in the meantime."
- "You are a brave woman, Mrs. Shipley, and a good one." Dr. James' worried face smoothed a little. "We will hope for the best, but I won't deceive you with what I fear would be false encouragement. We will spread no alarm till we're sure and we'll take every possible precaution."
  - "His people?"
- "I wouldn't advise telegraphing for a few hours. They could do no more than will be done in their absence and the news would make Mrs. Kingsbury ill. We'll watch this thing together, today, Mrs. Shipley, and please God we may be mistaken."

Half an hour later, Dr. James stood on one side of the hedge gate and Mr. Shipley on the other, while the situation was explained. Mr. Shipley was paler than his wife had been and he groaned out loud. "My girl in danger like that!"

The doctor took off his hat as if he didn't [211]

feel the sharp wind. "She's one in a thousand, man. I don't blame you for breaking your heart if trouble comes to her. But keep up courage — we'll pull through. Don't let the word leak out — we'll give ourselves the benefit of the doubt for a few hours, anyway. She sent her love, Shipley, as cheerfully as if she'd been going fishing, and said you are not to worry."

It was a face full of anguish that turned away from the doctor, but by the time Papa Shipley called the children he was outwardly as calm and serene as ever. A chorus of wails greeted Mamma's absence, but Joy behaved beautifully. "Shame on us all for being so selfish," she said. "We have Mamma all the time and now we ought to be glad to lend her to Van while he needs her. I'll tell you, we'll make her happy by having everything done just perfectly lovely when she comes home to the Little Yellow House."

Papa swallowed his coffee over a lump that almost choked him. Would Mamma ever, ever come back to the Little Yellow House?

But deary me, it wasn't half as bad as it [212]

threatened. Like many and many things in this old world, the worry over what might happen was far worse than what did happen When Dr. James came at night, Van's fever had fallen, his mind had cleared, and the blotches, many and ugly though they were, had evidently done the worst they intended to do. "Chicken pox, pure and simple." That was what he said, but he almost shouted it out. Mrs. Shipley didn't speak. She only grasped the invalid's hand tighter than ever and smiled — oh, how she smiled. And out from her heart was pouring a perfect flood of thanksgiving and joy. "I had chicken pox as a child," she was saying to herself, "so I won't take it again and I can go home to my brood as soon as it's safe for them."

Maybe Papa Shipley wasn't happy when he heard. Maybe he didn't dance a breakdown, out in the barn, with no one but Dick and Dolly to see! He didn't dare let the young Shipleys know how glad he was, for fear they'd guess how sorry he'd been.

Well, it was soon over. Chicken pox doesn't amount to much, usually, and for all

Van's made such a big fuss in arriving it took its departure very quietly. Mamma came home after only a few days' absence, escorted by a bodyguard that a queen might envy, for every heart was full of love and loyalty. Joy had a nice supper ready, the children were on their best behavior and everything was as lovely as possible. And only Mamma understood why Papa's prayer at worship that night was so full of thanksgiving or why his voice grew husky more than once.

Over at the Shining Palace, Van stood, looking across, and he, too, had his earnest petition. "Please, dear God, bless the Little Yellow House and everybody in it—especially Mrs. Shipley."

When Mr. Kingsbury came home and heard all about it from his own boy and Dr. James: heard how Mrs. Shipley had planned to nurse Van, even through the loathsome disease they feared, he couldn't speak for a while. He went over and tried to thank Mamma Shipley, safe and sound in her own dear home, but she made so light of it she wouldn't listen to half he wanted to say.

"There was no other way — please say no more about it," she said laughingly. "Lovely weather, isn't it, Mr. Kingsbury?"

"She risked her own life for my boy." Mr. Kingsbury said it over and over to himself. "She won't let me thank her, but if Father and Genevieve can't help me devise some means of getting even with her, I'll—I will—at least I'll spend the rest of my life trying. God bless that little woman!"

When Mrs. Kingsbury and Grandfather came home, much improved by the salt air, the Shining Palace looked just as when they left it. The Little Yellow House, too, stood in the wintry sunshine as placidly as if no trouble had threatened its inmates. So the shadow that had hovered over both homes left only the trace that such shadows are intended to leave — more thankfulness for the many days when the sun shines in a cloudless sky, and more trust in the One who cares for His own. Van's music went on, Joy's voice continued to improve, and their efforts together became very popular in both families. It really began to look as if the first

#### THE JOLLY SHIPLEYS

use the Education Fund would be put to was a piano for the Little Yellow House. "It would be a pleasure to us all and is almost a necessity for the girls," Mamma said. "Even though Dimple is to be an artist, she'll probably be a musical one."

"Yes, honey," assented Papa, smiling as he remembered a certain surprise that was growing out of the City Hall contract, and that even Mamma wasn't to know till it was ready.

# CHAPTER XVI GRANDFATHER

It was a very bleak and dreary day. Joy always remembers that first, whenever she thinks of it, because it seemed such appropriate weather for heart-breaking things to happen. A cold rain fell all day, freezing as it touched the ground, and the people who had to be out in it slipped and slid as if the whole town were a skating rink and its citizens all learners. The Shipley children came home from school, damp and chilly. "And every one with a grouch on," as Billy expressed it.

"I hate winter and I don't believe spring will ever come again," scolded Joy as she took off her rubbers on the back porch.

"I fell down three times and all four of my ankles is skinned," mourned Dandy, struggling with his overcoat.

Bensie didn't laugh or make remarks about quadrupeds. Instead he said to his sister

rather crossly, "You don't need to growl now you're home. We boys have all the chores to do—cow to milk and horses to feed and—"

"And then a warm, comfy home and a good hot supper," said Mamma from the door. "Come in, chickabiddies, and get thawed out, first thing you do. Here's a fresh cranberry turnover apiece. Aren't they comforting?"

"You are, anyway." Joy patted Mamma's cheek and kissed it. "We ought to be ashamed to grumble, but everything's so horrid."

"Out of doors, you mean. Not in our home," Mamma reminded her. "As long as the Little Yellow House holds eight people, all well and busy, all contented and happy, weather doesn't count for much, dearies. Now if we had to move into some crowded-up city house it might be different, but here—"

"Here's the dandiest place of all. I hope we'll never live anywhere else till we die," and Billy picked up the last, scattered crumbs of his turnover.

"There comes Van. Even the grass is slick — see him skid, then?" and Bert waved a bit of crust at his hurrying neighbor. But Van didn't laugh and wave back. Instead he hurried on and his face showed pale through his tan as Mamma let him in.

"Grandfather's awfully ill, Mrs. Shipley," he said nervously. "Doctor's been with him an hour and it's some sort of stroke, I guess."

"Why, Van, I'm very sorry to hear that. Sit here by the fire, dear, a minute. You're all in a tremble. Drink this hot milk—you'll feel better for it."

"Thank you — that is good. Seems like you always know what to do for folks, Mrs. Shipley." Van handed the empty cup back. "Mother hates to ask it in all this slipperiness, but — Grandfather's been asking for you and it seems to worry him because you don't come. Doctor said just now she'd better send for you."

Mrs. Shipley had whisked her apron off before Van half finished and Joy was bringing her rubbers. "Of course I'll go this minute. I'm sorry they waited, Van. Daughter, if I should be detained you'll know what to do."

"Yes'm, we'll see to everything. Can't you stay, Van?"

"No, I might be needed," Van answered soberly. "My grandfather's a very sick man, doctor says."

"But very sick men often get well," Joy reminded him.

"Yes, but doctor told Mother his age was against him. Here is Godfrey to help you, Mrs. Shipley. Let him get on that side and I'll go on this. Don't fall, for anything."

"Not I," laughed Mamma. "You could hardly push me down. I'm sure-footed as a cat. Bad weather, Godfrey. Makes us thankful for comfortable homes, doesn't it?"

"It does so, 'm. Be careful — 'ere's rawther a nawsty step, 'm."

They got across safely and in another minute Mamma was kneeling beside Mr. Atkinson. She had never been in his bedroom before, but she didn't even see the heavy old mahogany with which it was furnished. All she did see was the flushed face on the

pillow whose dull eyes followed her motions with a distressed look. She took his hand in hers and began rubbing it gently as she waited.

"Mrs. Shipley is here, Father. Can you tell her what you wanted?" Mrs. Kingsbury's voice was full of distress.

The sick man tried to speak — tried again and again but no word came — only sounds that they could not understand.

"Very slowly — try very slowly, Mr. Atkinson. There is no hurry, you know," Mrs. Shipley reminded him. "Is there something you want me to do?"

The white head made a little motion.

- "Not that? Well, I'll wait till you are ready very slowly."
  - "Van—ill—" he said thickly.
- "Oh, no, Mr. Atkinson, Van's quite well, only very sorry you feel badly."
  - "Townsend tell —"
- "Mr. Townsend is away, you know, Father. But that doesn't matter. We don't need any lawyer here, dear."

"Soon as you feel able she'll be here to read to you, every single day," promised Mamma. "You haven't been strong enough lately, but she will be ready when you are."

"Rod — staff —" the thick voice trailed into silence.

"Yes. His rod and staff, they comfort you."

A look of peace came into the troubled face as Mrs. Shipley slowly repeated the words of the Shepherd Psalm. Grandfather's eyes closed and the doctor came forward.

"That must have been what he wanted, Mrs. Shipley. Thank you. The nurse for whom we 'phoned is at the gate. Now if you can persuade Mrs. Kingsbury to lie down, I shall appreciate your help."

"Come, dear friend. You may need your strength more, later on. Save yourself for your father's sake," and Mrs. Shipley led her weeping neighbor away.

"Can't you stay with me? I need you so," Mrs. Kingsbury begged, and Mamma Shipley laid aside her wrap and sat down.

The icy darkness fell and through it Papa [222]

Shipley came trudging home. His cheery whistle was silent for once and his eyes looked heavy as he came into the light.

"Where's Mamma?" he asked, though that was nothing unusual. Every Shipley there was asked that question when she was out of sight.

"Over at Van's. Mr. Atkinson is awfully sick and they sent for her."

"And we've been good and I that the table," added Dimple, who had put the knives and forks around quite tidily.

"I'm glad, lovey. Everybody who gets in trouble wants our Mamma, don't they? Sometimes when we want her ourselves."

Bensie stared. Was it Papa Shipley, saying a thing like that?

"Pops, you're tired out," he declared.

"Here are your slippers—the chores are done and supper's ready. Beastly old day, wasn't it?"

"Not pleasant," Papa admitted. "But weather doesn't count for much."

"That's exactly what Mamma said when we came home from school," Joy told him.

"She says that as long as we live happy in the Little Yellow House, outside things don't matter."

Was that a sigh — a deep one? Who ever knew Papa Shipley to sigh. "We'll all keep quiet and let Papa rest. He's about played out, and no wonder," said thoughtful Bensie.

"No, no, children. Chatter away as usual.
I'll enjoy it. Daughtie, don't look so distressed — a bit of headache is nothing."

Try as they would the Shipleys couldn't make things go as briskly as usual. Conversation dragged, the little folks got sleepy, Billy broke one of the good cups and Joy scolded him for it. Altogether it was rather uncomfortable, and they almost shouted for joy when Mamma came in. She told them that Mr. Atkinson was unconscious and then in a jiffy she straightened things out.

"Henry, you've been working too hard today. Joy dear, put Dimple and Dandy right to bed. Boysies, finish your lessons as soon as possible and keep quiet about it. Now, Henry, lie here on the couch and let me rub your head — dear old head that thinks

#### GRANDFATHER

for us all. No wonder it gets tired sometimes."

But after the children were all in bed and the Little Yellow House quiet for the night Mamma said, "Now tell me, Henry."

"You little wizard!" Papa smiled rather wanly. "I can't keep a thing from you, can I?"

"Not a thing, so it's useless to try. It isn't good news this time, but you needn't be afraid to tell me because I can bear it all right, since I know it isn't my babies or their father." Mamma smoothed the hot forehead with a steady touch.

"Honey, the Little Yellow House is sold."

"Henry — our home! Who bought it? Oh, Henry, whoever he is, he will let us stay, won't he? He couldn't make us go away when we're so happy here, could he?"

For just a minute it looked as if Papa would have to turn comforter. For just a minute it seemed as if Mamma was going to break down and cry, as Dimple might have done.

But only for a minute. Then she made Papa lie down again and her hand went steadily back and forth while she said, "I'd like to hear all about it, Henry."

"I'm afraid I don't know a great many details myself, honey. The business was transacted through agents. Mr. Pearce, our landlord, is still abroad, but his agent, Jones, told me when I went to pay the rent today. He gave me a three months' notice, honey, and I'm afraid we'll have to move."

Mamma cleared her throat and waited a minute before she asked, "Was he sure the new owner wouldn't want to rent it?"

"Practically so. Some wealthy man bought it through his agent and Mr. Jones thinks it will probably be torn down and a fine house put in its place. It will be a good location, honey, when Schuyler Street is improved farther out, and the Little Yellow House might not match its new neighbors. They'll all be Shining Palaces, I suppose." Papa smiled rather sadly as he used Joy's whimsical fancy.

"The Little Yellow House torn down! Of course I can, Henry, but it seems just for the minute as if I can't stand it."

#### GRANDFATHER

Two strong arms reached up and clasped the little mother close. "We can make another place for ourselves, my precious. It will always be a happy home where you are."

"And you, Henry. Don't leave you out. I'm going to be brave and — and cheerful and I suppose there are nooks even in this big city where we can take refuge. But oh, my Little Yellow House!"

The children had to be told—that was decided. "There are only three months and they'll need to get their bearings, too. Perhaps they can help us find another place."

So the sad news was broken next morning and a sorrowful band set off for school, in spite of Mamma's determined good cheer.

Van didn't hear the news till late. Just before night he ran across to carry news of the invalid, whose condition was unchanged, and Bensie told him. He didn't say one word but his expression spoke for him. It would never do to cry—great boy that he was—and before people, too, even though the people were the Shipleys. But a fellow couldn't

talk with a lump in his throat like a walnut. He did try a time or two, then gave it up and slipped away and Bensie closed the door behind him with tears in his own eyes.

Up to his room tore Van, and back to his old post in the window. How many times he had stood there watching the lights in the Little Yellow House. They had always spoken good cheer to him. Soon they were to shine their last. Soon the walls where Joy had trained the roses would be torn down—the woodbine gate would be taken away, the—the—oh, how could a fellow help it when the Little Yellow House with all it stood for was going out of his life?

Godfrey came and tapped. "Dinner is served, Master Van."

"All right, I'll be there." But it took a few minutes to bathe the redness out of his eyes and when he got down stairs, Father and Mother were at the table.

He made his announcement at once. "The Little Yellow House is sold to some rich old guy and he's going to tear it down and build a fine one."

"Say that again, kid," Father commanded, while Mother gasped and said, "Oh, never, Van. That can't be."

"Yes, they're all broke up over it. Got to move in three months and don't know where."

Father put down the carving knife as if it didn't matter a bit whether anybody in the Shining Palace got roast lamb or not.

"If I'd had any idea Pearce wanted to sell I'd have bought it myself," he said. "We'll certainly miss our neighbors."

"Oh, Daddy, maybe you can buy a place they'd like and let them live there forever. Maybe it needn't be very far away."

"I wish it might be done. I regret this affair very much." Father picked up the knife again with a sigh and Mother wiped both eyes on her pretty handkerchief as if she didn't care who saw her do it.

But everything else was forgotten for a time, when later that night Grandfather went peacefully away, to come back no more. He never rallied after the first few hours, so nobody knew what he had tried so hard to say to Mrs. Shipley. "But I think that it was

only that he wanted to express his friendliness," Mamma told his daughter, "and perhaps to tell us he was ready to go. I'm sure he was ready, dear Mrs. Kingsbury. I had a heart-to-heart talk with him only last week. Oh, yes, he was waiting for the summons and I think he wanted us to know the Shepherd was with him in the Valley of the Shadow of Death."

"It's times like this winter that make a fellow grow into a man while you wait," said Van to Bensie the day after the funeral. "You can't be happy all the time and there's no good expecting it."

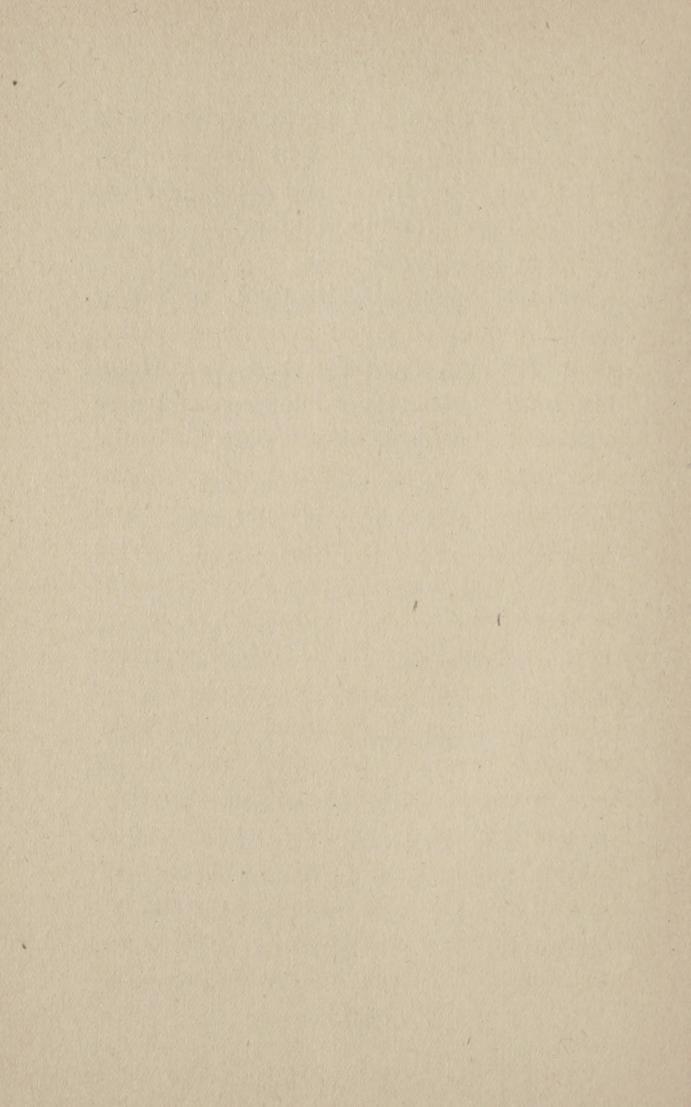
"We have to have the hard things same as the happy ones," Bensie reminded him. "And there's always two sides to everything."

"What do you mean by that, Ben?"

"Why, like Mr. Atkinson, you know. Your side is to feel all around bad, but his side is Heaven, Van. And even when you live in what Joy calls the Shining Palace, Heaven is a good deal better."

#### GRANDFATHER

- "That's right, and I guess Grandfather's pretty glad he's there. But Ben Shipley, there is one thing that hasn't got a good side to it, and I dare you to say it has."
  - "What's that, Van?"
- "It's the Shipleys leaving the Little Yellow House."
- "I don't suppose you're right, Van Kingsbury, but—" Ben stopped and choked before he finished—" I feel as if you were."



### CHAPTER XVII

## "HOME, SWEET HOME"

Joy had doubted if spring would ever come again, yet in a few short days it arrived. March came in like a whole flock of lambs and the sun shone as if trying to make the earth forget the icy storms and cold of winter. The pigeons cooed and preened, Auby and her neighbors talked in friendly fashion, Dick and Dolly tossed their manes and nickered at the breeze that came in through the opened windows, while Star looked as if thinking about pastures green and buttercups.

The Shipleys were all suspiciously cheerful. Not one of them confessed the heartache that made spring a hardship instead of a joy. No one reminded another that a garden couldn't be dug or vines trained or grapevines trimmed in a place that was going to be torn to pieces in a few short weeks. Nobody put into words the thought that they hadn't

the slightest idea where the Shipleys themselves would be when all that came to pass. But every one thought about it most of the time.

Bensie had spent every spare hour prowling the outlying parts of town — for outlying it must be, what with all the family menagerie. Papa went to and from business by a different route daily. Joy and Miss Cora scoured the school neighborhood, Billy and Bert drove Dick and Dolly up one street and down another. But no one had found a counterpart of, or even a substitute for, the Little Yellow House.

"We'll just have to go back to the farm. That's all there is to it," moaned Dandy after the meeting when they all had to report failure.

"We can't do that, now, sonny-boy," Mamma told him. "Business and schools—those are the reasons."

"And our Education Fund is getting a little bigger. We'll have college to prepare for," added Bensie.

Mamma smiled bravely. Her eyes were a [234]

little bit heavy and her cheeks weren't quite so rosy as usual, but if anybody had accused her of having the blues she would have denied it stoutly — and truly.

"Chickabiddies," she said. "The reason you haven't found our place is because you haven't gone where it is. There's a suitable home waiting, just as the Little Yellow House was waiting, and when the right time comes, we'll find it."

"Miss Cora wishes we'd take a place big enough so she could board with us," said Joy.

"That would be nice for some reasons," began Mamma but Papa shook his head decidedly.

"Once for all, daughtie, no boarders for Mamma to take care of. We all like Miss Cora but she'll have to be content with visiting the Lit — with visiting us. I must go, honey. My time's up."

"Honk-honk," sounded at the gate right after school.

"There's Van — see what he wants, Bensie."

"He's come to take Mamma house hunting," announced Ben a moment later. "Can you go?"

"To be sure I can and glad of the chance," said that lady briskly. "I shouldn't be one bit surprised if I find It this very afternoon."

"We won't go far," called Van. "We can't let you get out of this part of town, so we won't hunt in any other."

"Indeed we don't want to. May I sit here by you, so we can talk, Van, dear? Joy, you can keep Dimple and Dandy in the back seat, can't you? Now we're ready."

The big car spun down Schuyler Street, Van touching his cap to a man just turning in at the Kingsbury gate.

"That's Mr. Townsend, Grandfather's lawyer," he explained. "He's been away ever since Grandfather died — I didn't know he'd come home. Now here's Remsen Street, Mrs. Shipley. It's nice; let's go slow and look here."

Back and forth they went, at a snail's pace that would have tried Van's soul if he

### "HOME, SWEET HOME"

hadn't been interested in his quest. But when they got back again to the woodbine gate, not one glimpse had they seen of the home of their dreams.

Ben was waiting for them. "Mrs. Kingsbury sent word for you to go over there, soon as you came, Mamma," he told her.

"Deary me, I hope no one is sick," said Mamma, looking startled. So many things had happened lately, it kept one on the lookout.

But no one was sick. Mrs. Kingsbury herself opened the door just as if Godfrey didn't live there, and she did a very strange thing—for Mrs. Kingsbury. She put both arms around her neighbor and kissed her three times while her face fairly beamed in spite of the black dress she wore.

"I must tell you myself, dear, first of all," she said, and her voice trembled with joy. "You are not to leave the Little Yellow House."

"Not leave—" Mrs. Shipley was be-wildered.

"No, not now or ever unless you want to."
[ 237 ]

"How can that be? I don't understand."

"Come up to Father's study and meet Mr. Townsend. He will tell you all about it. Have this seat—it's more comfortable." Mrs. Shipley found herself in the green velvet chair where Joy had sat so long ago and waged her gentle warfare with Grandfather's crustiness.

The gentleman at the big table was handling some legal-looking documents but even with all his explanations it took Mamma Shipley a long time to comprehend what had really happened, though Mamma Shipley was usually anything but dull.

It isn't necessary to tell all the details. Perhaps it is enough to say that the "rich old guy" of whom Van had spoken so disrespectfully was no other than Grandfather himself. He had bought the Little Yellow House outright, but so far from demolishing it, he meant to fix it so no one else could do that unless the Shipleys wanted it done. He had told everything to Mr. Townsend so that gentleman could be sure that all was arranged just as Grandfather wanted it.

"He did not hint it to us," said Mrs. Kingsbury. "Mr. Townsend says he had planned a grand surprise for the two families — yours and ours — as soon as the matter was settled. He didn't dream that you would hear of it and be worried. I'm sure of that, dear Mrs. Shipley."

"He would have told me himself if he could have talked — that day." Mamma Shipley's voice was full of feeling. "That was what worried him — he was afraid I'd hear."

"Yes, and when he spoke of Van's illness and Joy's reading he wanted you to know why he was interested in you and yours. I see it all now."

"Oh, I do thank my Heavenly Father for a friend like that. What am I that a blessing so great should come to me?" Mamma's eyes overflowed and Mr. Townsend spoke gently.

"My client greatly appreciated your care of his grandson during an illness this winter. He spoke of it more than once and was warm in his praises. He mentioned your family, too, and his desire that they should be permanent companions for Van. Then he added, 'In order that this may be assured, Townsend, put through the deal without loss of time.' I did so, madam, and only my enforced absence from the city and consequent ignorance of my client's sudden death has caused you to suffer unnecessary anxiety. This anxiety I especially regret as it was what my lamented client desired to prevent.'

Mrs. Shipley rose. "I think I must go tell my family, dear friend. It isn't kind to keep the knowledge from them a moment longer. Mr. Shipley will be home soon. How glad I am to be able to tell him that you are our landlords now, and we may stay."

"Oh, no, no, dear! Don't you understand yet? Father not only bought the property but he willed it to you. It is yours — every foot of ground — every inch of house, all sealed and signed as fast as law can make it!"

She had to sit down again. Her knees trembled as if they'd let her fall. It really was startling, you know, when she'd been expecting exactly the reverse. And then they let Van in. Do you think he waited

## "HOME, SWEET HOME"

for their very own mother to tell the junior Shipleys? He tore through the hedge gate as if wild Indians were after him and gave a war-whoop as if he were after the Indians. When Mamma got home, five minutes later, the Little Yellow House was as if pandemonium had broken loose and it was a mercy she was able to straighten them out before Papa came, or he'd have thought they'd all gone crazy in a heap. Yet after he heard the news he was about as bad as the worst of them and if there was any supper eaten in the Little Yellow House that night, it must have been Yankee Doodle who did it.

The very next morning activities for spring began in earnest, rakes and hoes, brooms and mops, out-doors and in, back yard and front. Every Shipley busy, planning as he worked. Everybody happy, singing like larks. Miss Cora to tea for the general rejoicing, bringing a great handful of crocuses by way of celebration.

In the evening, the Kingsburys; and for all you could see they were as happy over the whole affair as the Shipleys themselves. In Mr. Kingsbury's pocket came the deed that made the gift secure and in his heart there was gladness that Genevieve's father had been able to accomplish what he would have been so happy to do. "I'll have my turn yet," he told his wife. "It was not only the smallpox scare that made me feel as I do. The Shipley influence has done a lot for me and for you, dear, as well as for our boy."

"It has indeed, Van Renssalaer, and not less for Father. His spiritual awakening that changed him so was due to Mamma Shipley. He told me that himself."

"Well, we've got 'em hard and fast, Van, old man," and Father slapped the lad on the back. "You're pretty well fixed for comrades now, I take it."

"Yes sir-ree," grinned Van.

So the Little Yellow House became a home in a new sense, and if you'd go far enough up Schuyler Street today, you'd come right to it and the happy family there among the trees and climbing roses. The back lot is nearly covered with flying pens now, and the Educa-

tion Fund is reaching very respectable proportions. One reason is that Papa Shipley didn't have to use it for the piano. That was his own happy secret which grew out of the City Hall contract, and if it cost him a good deal of self-denial and extra hard work, who minded that, since he rejoiced to do it?

Joy is making good use of that same piano. She and Van are earnestly building ambitious plans which may or may not materialize as time goes by. But in the meantime, her music makes happiness in the Little Yellow House, whose inmates are sure that no singer since Jenny Lind had such a voice as Joy's.

The three Bees are working away the same as ever and growing sturdily the while. Dandy has nearly caught up with Billy in height, much to Billy's disgust. Dimple is a curly-headed schoolgirl who aspires to Miss Cora's class as her highest ambition, while Papa and Mamma Shipley are just the same as ever, busy, cheery, and wholesome, rejoicing in their own happiness and doing all they can to pass it on to others.

The Shining Palace family is just the same [243]

— only different — as Van says. They don't think of spending vacations anywhere but on the farm and Mrs. Kingsbury thinks it agrees with her even better than Atlantic City. Godfrey is a little grayer, Ann a good deal fatter, and Marie has gone to a home of her own, leaving a younger sister in her place.

Grandfather's study is as he left it and Joy likes to go in there sometimes. She sits in the green velvet chair and thinks grateful thoughts of the old man who did so much for her and hers. Then she goes back to the home she loves with a glad heart.

If you'd like to know the secret of the Shipley happiness you won't find it in their riches, for they aren't rich. Or their political influence, for they have none. As Van says, they don't give a "whoop" for society and their clothes are not in the height of style. But the spirit of loving helpfulness is theirs—the joy of letting their light shine. And to the possessors of this secret, happiness is sure to come, whether their dwelling be a "Shining Palace," or only a "Little Yellow House."

